

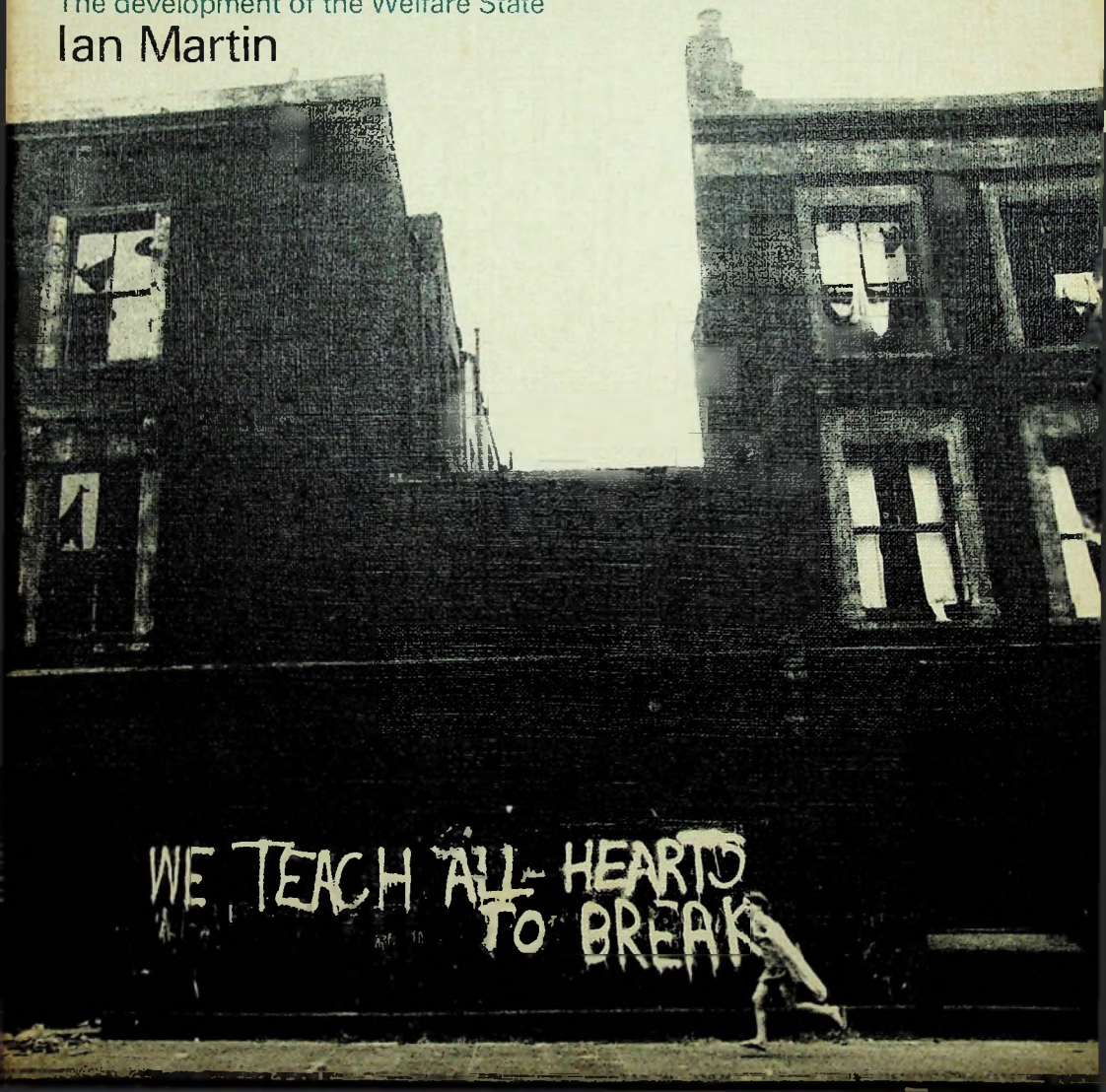
Topics in history



From workhouse to welfare

The development of the Welfare State

Ian Martin



WE TEACH ALL HEARTS
TO BREAK

Penguin Education
Topics in history

From workhouse to welfare

The founding of the Welfare State

Ian Martin

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Introduction: a century of change

A black shame

These young fellows round here haven't a chance of a day's shift. They're closing down many of the pits. And it's worse for the older men who are put off first, and won't get another week's wage as long as they live. It's a black shame when men have no kind of hope.

This remark was made by a young miner in Durham in the 1930s. It could have been said by millions of other men all over the country facing a lifetime of hopelessness.

With unemployment went widespread poverty:

Among people who have been unemployed for several years continuously I should say it is the exception to have anything like a full set of bedclothes. Often there is nothing that can be properly called bedclothes at all — just a heap of old overcoats and miscellaneous rags on a rusty iron bedstead. In this way overcrowding is aggravated. One family of four persons that I knew, a father and mother and two children, possessed two beds but could only use one of them because they had not enough bedding for the other.

That was during the childhood of people who are middle-aged today. Widespread unemployment and poverty are recent. Their memories will haunt many older people till they die. Yet even in the 1930s men could remember far worse times. Elderly men recalled the days when boys climbed chimneys to clean them:

No one knows the cruelty which a boy has to undergo in learning. The flesh must be hardened. This is done by rubbing it, chiefly on the elbows and knees with the strongest brine, as that got from a pork shop, close by a hot fire. You must stand over them with a cane, or coax them by a promise of a halfpenny, etc. if they will stand a few more rubs.

At first they will come back from their work with their arms and knees streaming with blood, and the knees looking as if the caps had been pulled off. Then they must be rubbed with brine again, and perhaps go off at once to

another chimney. In some boys I have found that the skin does not harden for years.

Self-help and state-help

This book covers less than one hundred and fifty years, but it starts when there were no pensions, no council flats, no pay during illness or unemployment, and when most children didn't go to school and could be employed in mines, or factories, or as chimney sweeps quite legally from the age of nine and, in practice, even from the age of four or five. This is an amazing change in people's lives in such a short period of time. Nowadays, a Welfare State with services like pensions, free medical treatment and unemployment benefits seems the natural way to run things. But such an outlook is a very recent thing.

There are defects in the Welfare State. There are also people who fail to get all the benefits they need and are entitled to. Nevertheless, it is striking that *nothing* on p. 10 was available to anyone a hundred years ago, very little of it fifty years ago and even twenty-five years ago — nothing like family allowances, welfare foods or rate rebates.

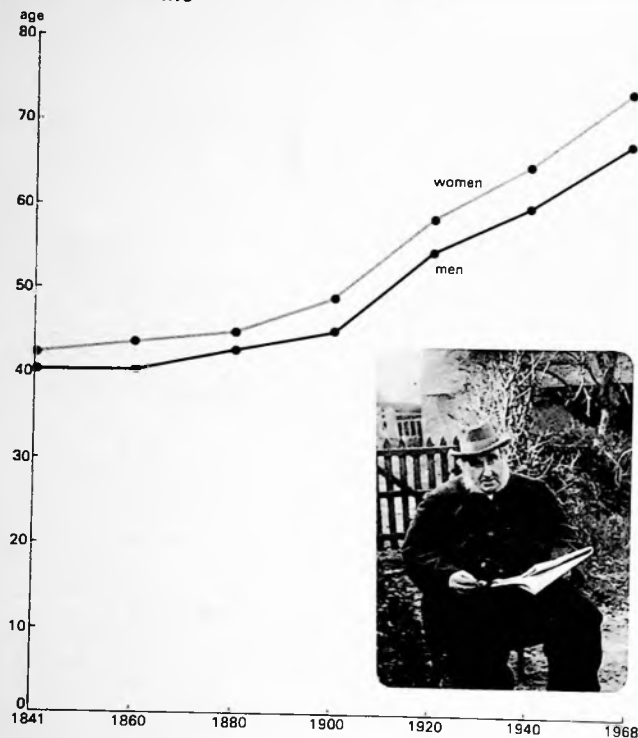
In the quite recent past, you fought misfortune on your own. Today, thousands of people and millions of pounds are available to provide help it is your *right* to have. It is an extraordinary change.

A society like ours is used to rapid change — of certain kinds. It is easier to see — indeed to expect — change in some parts of life than others. The pop record of last month or the clothes of last year are out of date. The refrigerators or TV sets of two or three years ago are also getting to look outdated. Changes over a longer period are harder to grasp, especially when they concern not things you can see or handle, but the ways people feel, the things they think important, the aspects of life they either put up with or try to change.



Unemployed miners searching for coal on a tip during the thirties.

1 Expectation of life



Times have changed

Most of these statistics are not directly about the Welfare State. They illustrate the pace of some other striking social changes. But a change in one aspect of life often has consequences, sometimes unexpected, elsewhere. What is the effect of earlier marriage on the demand for housing? Why do so many more babies survive? Why do people live longer? What problems do these particular changes cause? What does diagram 5 mean for the welfare services? Or diagram 3 for rates and taxes? Or diagrams 6 and 7 for the National Health Service?

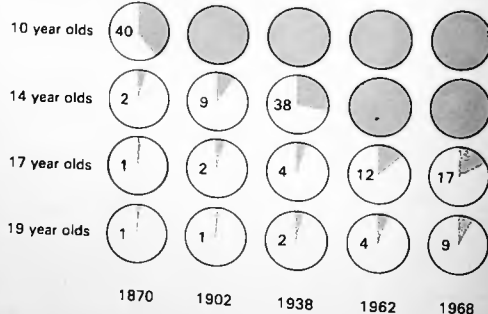
2 Infant mortality

number of deaths under one year per 1000 babies born

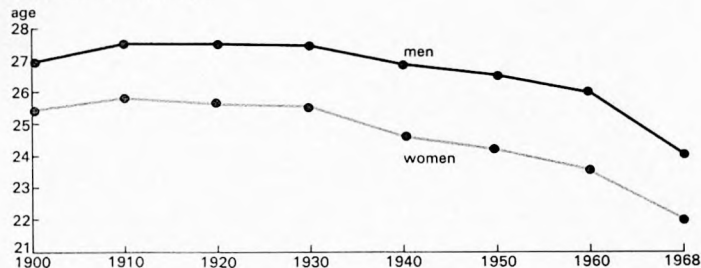


3 Full-time education

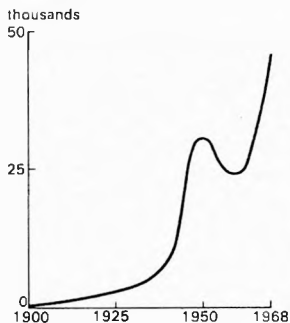
number as a percentage



4 Age at first marriage

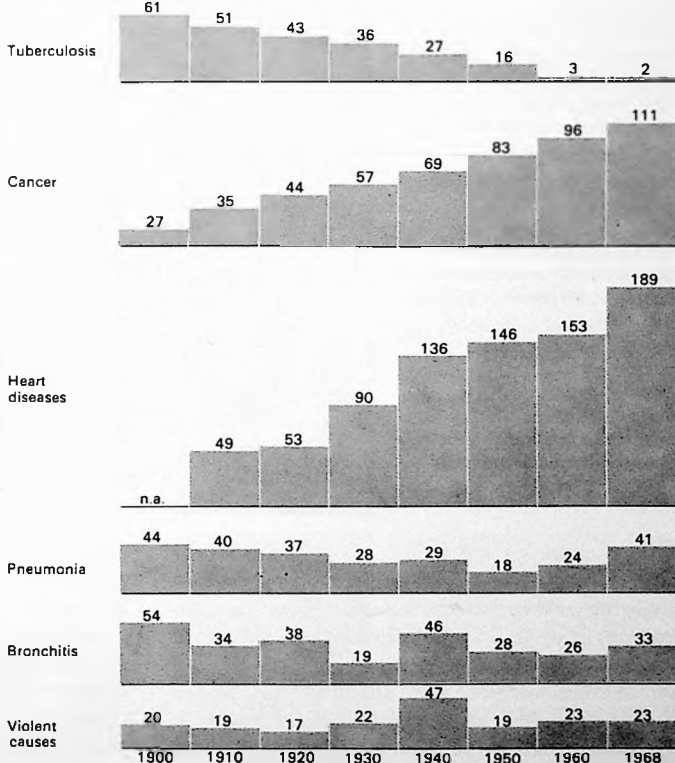


5 Divorces



6 Main causes of death

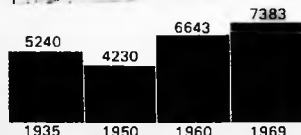
to nearest thousand



7 Deaths from road accidents

Man killed in A505 pile-up

A man was killed and several other people were injured in a multiple accident involving a Volkswagen, a coach and a lorry on the A505, the H...



The Welfare State helps people in many different situations, not just extreme poverty. Most of the benefits are surprisingly recent. When the pensioners were born none of these benefits was available.



This man gets a number of special benefits from the Welfare State because he is unemployed. His family have not much money saved and they get supplementary benefit as well as unemployment benefit.

Unemployment benefit

£13.35 a week (flat-rate benefit of £6 a week plus £3.70 for the wife, £1.85 for the first child, 95p for the second child, and 85p for the third child) plus an extra sum related to his previous earnings.

Supplementary allowance

(the old national assistance)

Rate rebate

Family allowances

Subsidized council flat

Free prescriptions

Free spectacles and dental treatment



This elderly couple have no income except their pension and very small savings. They get:

Retirement pension

£9.70 a week

Supplementary pension

depending on savings and expenses.

Subsidized flatlet for old people

Free prescriptions

Free home help

Free chiropody

Cheap 'meals on wheels'

Free bus pass

and various other services depending on the local authority.



This family doesn't seem to need very much help from the Welfare

State. The father has a well-paid job and so had the mother until directly before the baby was due. All the same the children and the mother get subject to various conditions:

Maternity allowance

for eighteen weeks at £6 or more a week

Maternity grant

£25 for baby clothes, pram etc.

Family allowances

for the second child and for the baby when it is born.

Cheap welfare foods

cost-price baby food, vitamins etc.

Subsidized meals at school

Free spectacles and dental treatment

for the children and the mother up to a year after the baby is born.

Free prescriptions

as above

Free bed and treatment in maternity hospital

to say nothing of a family doctor, sickness benefit if needed, free education (and cheap higher education in due course), cheap evening classes, free libraries, help from social workers, tax relief on the mortgage on their home, tax relief on their life assurance and private pension payments and so on. Which only goes to show that the people doing well out of the Welfare State are not always the ones you think of first.

The changes we are talking about deal with the major aspects of life — people's homes; their chances of enjoying good health and a decent education; their conditions at work; and the help available to them if, through sickness, age or bad luck, they are out of work. A hundred years ago, all these were, by our present standards, appalling for most people. It proved a long struggle to reform any of them, because it involved changing deep-rooted ideas. The lives

people lead still depend very much on the class they were born in and their own abilities. But not entirely. We also recognize that the community as a whole has a responsibility. When people are in trouble it is now not just their own affair, or something dependent on charity. It is a responsibility that has to be undertaken by everyone and administered by the government. Most of all, this book is about attitudes, about responsibility and the kind of lives we want.

Part one

Certain individuals stand out in the attempts to improve social conditions in the nineteenth century. Their outlook and motives varied greatly. Many of them could have quarrelled violently with each other — and in some cases did — over why there was poverty and how it could be relieved.



Charles Booth (1840–1916)
Booth pioneered many new methods in social research and after eighteen years work completed *The Life and Labour of the People of London* which included a famous series of maps in which different colours show the degree of poverty found street by street. He put forward the idea of Old-Age Pensions.



Edwin Chadwick (1800–1890)
A villain in Chapter 4, a hero in Chapter 2. As Secretary to the Poor Law Commissioners he rigidly enforced the New Poor Law and was hated by the poor throughout England. At the same time his campaign for improved public health standards antagonized the rich but was vitally necessary. To him, both were for the public good.



Joseph Chamberlain (1836–1914)
A brilliantly successful Birmingham businessman who as Mayor 1873–6 revolutionized the effectiveness of local authorities in tackling slums and public health. In Parliament he inspired many reforms including working-class housing, free education and Workmen's Compensation. Colonial Secretary and champion of tariff reform.



Charles Dickens (1812–1870)
He was the greatest of many writers who recounted vividly how the poor lived. He never forgot his period working in a blacking factory or his bankrupt father in the debtors' prison. Even when he had become famous and rich he remained outraged by the middle class's indifference to factory conditions, workhouses and slums.



Friedrich Engels (1820–1895)
Close collaborator with Karl Marx as one of the founders of modern Communism. He argued that the sufferings of the working class revealed the essential brutality of capitalism, which had in it the seeds of its own destruction. Revolution, not reform, was the only real way forward.



Octavia Hill (1838–1912)
Granddaughter of Dr Southwood Smith the public-health reformer. She energetically demonstrated that slum housing could be reclaimed to provide decent homes and still make a profit. Knowing what slum life in towns was like, she also crusaded for open spaces and founded the National Trust to preserve them for the public.



Henry Mayhew (1812–1887)
described his *London Labour and the London Poor* as 'the history of a people, from the lips of the people themselves'. With two helpers he interviewed thousands of people in the streets of London 'to give the rich a more intimate knowledge of the sufferings, and the frequent heroism under those sufferings, of the poor'.



Lord Shaftesbury (1801–1885)
From his entry to Parliament in 1826 until his death, fighting for one good cause after another — waifs and strays, paupers, lunatics, climbing boys, children in factories, flower girls, better housing, the ten-hour day — he championed practically all those whom respectable society preferred to ignore.

1 'Heaven helps those who help themselves'

The people of nineteenth-century England were not heartless. The difference between the treatment of the poor then and now is not simply that everyone has become miraculously kinder. The reason is partly that *everyone* is much richer today than they were in Victorian England. It is easier for a very rich country to treat its poorer citizens well.

Varied reasons

And yet Britain could be producing just as much wealth, but sharing it so unequally that the poor were just as poor as ever. It is not at all equally shared at present, of course, but there could be a far greater gulf between the richest and the poorest. Taxation levels things to some extent. This is a deliberate attempt, of which most people approve, to ensure that those who possess or earn most contribute most to the country's needs, including the welfare of those who have little. What is more important — what makes it possible to tax the rich to help the poor — is the recognition today that 'the poor' are not a distinct category of lazy people who can't take care of their money. People may be poor for very varied reasons, many of which are certainly not their own fault.

It is easy to recognize this in some cases — people who are blind, or disabled, or mentally handicapped will obviously be poorer than the rest of the community unless they are given special help. In certain parts of the country jobs are harder to get. There are too few new industries like plastics or electronics replacing traditional ones like coalmining that have seen their best days. People there are likely to be poorer, especially if they are unemployed. Elderly people who have stopped earning may find that their savings or pensions buy less year by year — as prices go up while their resources don't. Or young people may move from one of the groups with fewest money worries to one of those with the most by the simple

act of getting married. It is not that their income has gone down, it is because their commitments have immensely increased. Money readily available before marriage for clothes or drink or records or entertainment afterwards has to stretch to meet rent or mortgage, rates, furniture, gas, electricity, house-keeping and so on. Not to mention a pram, baby clothes and all the other paraphernalia of babies.

Almost any young couple feels poor compared with when they were single. They are not of course poor compared with elderly people who wonder how they are going to afford the warmth of a one-bar electric fire. But they still need help because some of the things they want are so expensive. Many young couples start off married life with one or other set of parents because they cannot find a home of their own at a price they can pay. Council housing is one answer to this — something provided by the welfare state not because people are very poor, but because good housing cannot be built at rents that most people can afford.

Poverty in fact is a very complex and variable thing. It is not a question of straightforward amounts of money — if you earn less than so much money, you are poor. It involves comparisons — the comparison between what you earn and what you feel are your minimum needs; between your life now and your life in the past; between what you have and what you see in other people's homes or in TV commercials. The definition of poverty is always changing — any humane society must always be adjusting its standards of help to those in need. If other people can buy cars and washing machines and television sets, it is not enough to see that the poorest simply get a roof over their heads and something to eat. The television commercial brings the trappings of affluence into every front room — you do not need broken shoes and meals without meat to be poor and know it.

Poverty 1870s/1970s They obviously aren't the same thing. This newspaper report describes the results of a survey in a poor part of Nottingham. The journalist has his doubts about whether people can be poor if they have television sets. Clearly they are not as poor as the 'crawler' below, but then they are not living in 1870. The quotation below is by the photographer, John Thompson.



Huddled together on the workhouse steps in Short's Gardens, those wrecks of humanity, the Crawlers of St Giles's, may be seen both day and night seeking mutual warmth and mutual consolation in their extreme misery. As a rule, they are old women reduced by vice and poverty to that degree of wretchedness which destroys even the energy to beg.

Stale bread, half-used tea-leaves, and on gala days, the fly-blown bone of a joint, are their principal items of diet.

The crawler, for instance, whose

portrait is now before the reader, is the widow of a tailor who died some ten years ago.

The woman, though once able to earn money as a tailoress, was obliged to abandon that style of work in consequence of her weak eyesight, and now her great ambition is to 'go out scrubbing'. But who will employ even for this menial purpose, a woman who has no home, no address to give, and sleeps on the workhouse steps when she cannot gain admittance into the casual ward?

John Thompson

TV IN 90 pc OF 'POVERTY HOMES'

DAILY TELEGRAPH REPORTER

A SURVEY of a Nottingham council estate found that 22 per cent. of the population were living in poverty. But it adds that 90 per cent. of the "poverty families" had television.

The survey, carried out by sociology students, also shows that of those living in poverty, 60 per cent. had washing machines, 20 per cent. record players, 40 per cent. vacuum cleaners, 10 per cent. refrigerators, five per cent. cars or motor-cycles and 85 per cent. radios.

More than a third of the families were considered to be living in poverty because their incomes were less than 40 per cent. above the total they would receive if they were getting social security aid from the State.

This level has become the accepted line below which most sociologists agree a family is in poverty.

JOINT INCOMES

£6 to £11 a week

Based on a 12 per cent. sample of an estate of 650 houses the survey indicated that 21 per cent. of the households on the estate had a combined income of between £6 and £11 a week, and a further 23 per cent. had between £11 and £17.

LUXURIES BOUGHT

TV instead of food

The report also finds that more and more of the consumer goods which were yesterday's luxuries have become today's necessities.

"It seems very plain that there are a number of people who would endure malnutrition rather than sacrifice the television set, or even the family car. It is quite pointless to moralise about such matters: new needs have been created."

Different nations

In the early nineteenth century this widely shared knowledge of how other people lived did not exist. A famous novel by Benjamin Disraeli, published in 1845, spoke of rich and poor as *The Two Nations*. For all the contact they had so they might have been. Ignorance stemmed not only from lack of newspapers to tell people about each other, but also from the general difficulties of communication. Some of the worst areas of poverty, such as the Lancashire cotton

mills, were extremely isolated before the spread of the railways in the 1840s. A journey from London to Manchester, which now takes about two and a half hours by rail, took about three days of laborious travelling in 1840. It is not surprising that news was scarce then. This does not, of course, excuse the ignorance of well-to-do Londoners about conditions within a mile (sometimes only a few yards) of their sumptuous homes. When a journalist, Henry Mayhew, actually explored the lives of working-class Londoners

He ran before me, treading cautiously with his naked feet, until I reached a convenient spot to take down his statement, which was as follows:

'I've got no mother or father; mother has been dead for two years, and father's been gone more than that — more nigh five years — he died at Ipswich in Suffolk. . . .

After mother died, sister still kept on making [hair] nets, and I lived with her for some time until she told me she couldn't afford to keep me no longer. . . .

I was fifteen the twenty-fourth of last May, Sir, and I've been sweeping crossings now near upon two years. There's a party of six of us and we have the crossings from St Martin's Church as far as Pall Mall. Yesterday on the crossing I got threepence ha'penny but when it's dry like today I do nothink, for I haven't got a penny yet. We never carry no pockets, for if the policemen find us we generally pass the money to our mates, for if money's found on us we have fourteen days in prison.

If I was to reckon all the year round, that is, one day with another, I think we make fourpence every day, and if we were to stick to it we should make more, for on a very muddy day we do better. . . .

When we see the rain we say together "Oh,

there's a jolly good rain! We'll have a good day tomorrow."

We pays threepence a night for lodging. Food, if we get plenty of money, we buys for ourselves. We buy a pound of bread, that's twopence farthing — best seconds and a farthing's worth of dripping — that's enough for a pound of bread — and we get a ha'porth of tea and a ha'porth of sugar; or if we're hard up we gets only a penn'orth of bread.'

from *London Labour and the London Poor* by Henry Mayhew



Samuel Smiles admired energy, cheerfulness, prudence, industry. The heroes he held up for others to copy were diverse — Thomas Arnold, Sir Robert Peel, Josiah Wedgwood, the Duke of Wellington, George Stephenson and the great engineers who created Victorian transport and industry.



in 1851, he introduced them in his book as 'a large body of persons of whom the public had less knowledge than of the most distant tribes of the earth'. And the *Observer* reviewing the book agreed: 'It describes what has never been described before; is full of facts entirely new; throws light where utter darkness has hitherto existed'. Of course, the middle-class public could have found out before Mayhew told them — had they wanted to. But they didn't. The poor were no concern of theirs — the way people lived was the will of God and it was fruitless or immoral to try to change it. There is a verse of the hymn, 'All things bright and beautiful' that expresses this attitude:

The rich man in his castle,
The poor man at his gate,
God made them, high or lowly,
And order'd their estate.

A comfortable belief, if you were the rich man. This verse, however, is not usually sung nowadays.

'Heaven helps those who help themselves'

The philosophy of the time was 'Heaven helps those who help themselves'. It was no accident that those were the opening words of one of the great best-sellers of Victorian England. Samuel Smiles's *Self-Help* (1859) was a collection of biographies of people who had made it by their own efforts, spiced with moral reflections.

It was a maxim of Dr Young, the philosopher, that 'Any man can do what any other man has done.'

No laws, however stringent, can make the idle industrious, the thriftless provident, or the drunken sober. Such reforms can only be effected by means of individual action, economy and self-denial, by better habits, rather than by greater rights.

The extremest poverty has been no obstacle in the way of men devoted to the duty of self-culture.

If one man could manage it, so could anyone else if they only showed a bit of determination. If, with all Smiles's splendid examples before you, you still remained poor, then it was clearly your own fault. You did not deserve help. Indeed, if you were helped; it might discourage you (and other people) from trying to rise by your own efforts.

Necessary spurs?

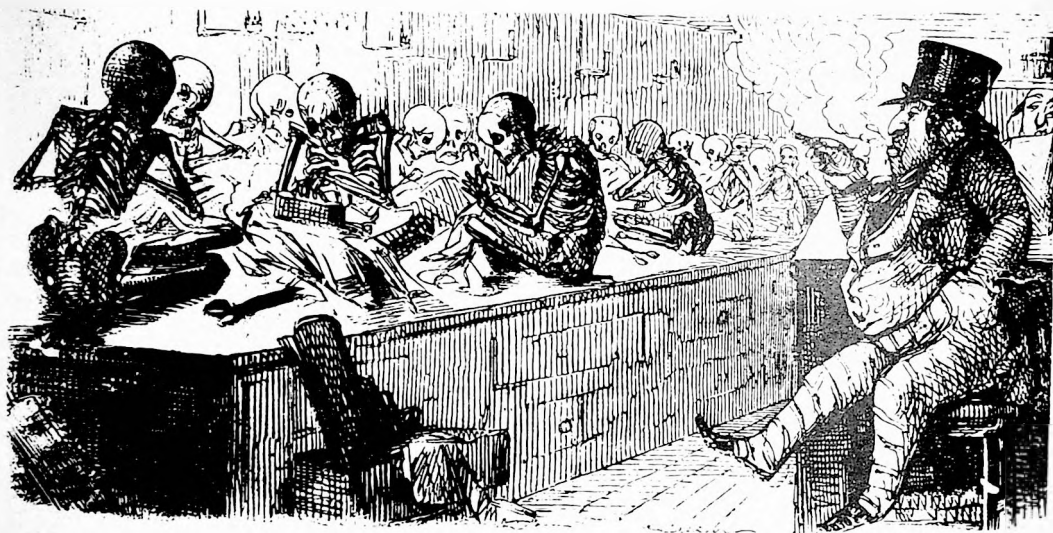
The *Economist* in 1848 put the point bluntly: 'Suffering and evil are nature's admonitions; they cannot be got rid of; and the impatient attempts of benevolence to banish them from the world by legislation . . . have always been more productive of evil than good.' Poverty and hardship were necessary spurs to make people work — interfering with them would impede the creation of wealth.

Unemployment, or factory accidents, or bad housing were regrettable, but they were just temporary pains as Britain became a great industrial nation. Sentimental attempts to interfere with them might help individuals, but it would harm everyone in the long run. What mattered was mining coal, building factories and manufacturing goods in the quickest, most efficient way. *Everyone* would then be richer.

Supply and demand

It was believed that successful business must be based on the law of supply and demand. If there was a demand for something, someone would supply it. The price

The exploitation of children in factories was attacked again and again by reformers. This 1845 cartoonist recognized that there were many mill-owners whose profits depended on the low wages they paid children and that they would fight bitterly any attempt to interfere with the supply of 'cheap clothing'.



would depend on how much demand and how much supply there was.

Nothing must interfere with this. People might be exploited by their employer, but they could always, in theory, go and work somewhere else and make a better bargain. The law of supply and demand would eventually see that everything worked out for the best. Even though pregnant women dragged loads up pit ladders, or cotton spinners lost limbs in unguarded machines, or metal grinders died at thirty through breathing in metal filings, people were afraid that changing the system would produce yet worse evils. Self-help was king.

The battle of life is, in most cases, fought uphill; and to win it without a struggle were perhaps to win it without honour.

Devil take the hindmost, or (as it was called) *laissez-faire*, let things take their course without interference.

Keeping down the population

A particularly strong reason for letting things take their course had been supplied at the start of the century by the economist, Thomas Malthus. His *Essay on the Principle of Population as it Affects the Future Improvement of Society* had a profound influence. In it he argued that the population always tended to go up quicker than the supply of food available. It was therefore impossible to improve people's conditions. If they were improved the population would go up, food would be insufficient and everyone would be back to where they started — or worse. Therefore war, famine and disease had in fact a positive *value* in keeping down the population.

This pessimistic outlook was rather modified in later editions of Malthus's book, but like many thinkers he was more influential for what people *thought* he had said than what he actually said.



Many middle-class Victorians were genuinely ignorant of how working-class people lived. Others, like Mr Podsnap in Dickens's novel *Our Mutual Friend*, were ready to ignore the poverty and hardships that contributed to their wealth: 'I don't want to know about it; I don't choose to discuss it; I don't admit it. The subject is a very disagreeable one.' The word 'Podsnapery' is now part of the language.

From his work many people felt it certain that helping the poor would encourage them to increase in number and so diminish the supply of food available to others. Help was in fact not merely unnecessary, but dangerous.

The extent of the horror

Basically kind men believed in this harsh doctrine. But they could only go on doing so because they knew very little about how poor people lived. This ignorance was breaking down as the century advanced. An increasing number of investigators painstakingly described the actual lives of poorer people, their conditions at work, the sort of housing they had to exist in and what happened to them in sickness or old age. It was a horrifying picture. As the extent of the horror became more apparent, as investigators revealed just how widespread was slum housing or

the exploitation of children, or poverty in old age, so there was increasing uneasiness about the adequacy of the ideal of 'self-help' and *laissez-faire*.

The gloomy prophecies of Malthus gradually lost their influence. Food supplies showed no sign of running short. It became difficult to ignore the hardships of the mass of the people, and difficult to justify doing nothing about them. If only a few people had been in need, it might have been possible to go on arguing that letting things run was for 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number' and that help would only sap people's will to work.

It was now clear however, as the century advanced, that the poor and exploited were numbered in thousands and millions, not tens and hundreds. The numbers were quite beyond the scope of self-help or private charity. The State, however reluctantly, had to step in.

2 'An Englishman's home'

In 1801, Britain's first census counted the population. It was ten and a half million. The bulk of these people lived in the country. By 1851 the population was just under twenty-one million. The bulk of these people lived in towns because that was where the work was. And they mostly lived in very bad housing. The increase in the population and the rush to live in towns were the start of a housing problem we have not yet solved.

Not that living in a village in the eighteenth century was a delight. Cottages were almost all cramped, damp and cold. Sometimes it was practically impossible to stand upright. Impure water was a constant source of illness. But a dozen such homes in the fields are one thing; hundreds of equally small and insanitary dwellings crowded together in a town are quite another. Picturesque discomfort gives way to mass squalor and disease.

The biggest profit in the shortest time

In the true spirit of supply and demand, the houses were put up at maximum speed and minimum cost. The builders did not worry about the health of the people who would live there — the biggest profit in the shortest time was what mattered. So 'back-to-back' housing sprouted everywhere — no drainage, few windows or other ventilation, no lavatories or water supply. The cheapest sites were often marshes — no matter, the people flooding in to the new jobs in the towns had to take what they could get. It was no one's job to protect them from the dangers to health that these conditions produced.

In measureless filth and stench

Houses abounded where the air was never free of the stench of the outside communal lavatory (not a water closet, of course), and 'where it is impossible to keep food without it being tainted for even a single night in

the cupboards on the side of the house next to the public necessary'. In 1842 it is recorded that nearly eighteen thousand people lived in cellars in Manchester and forty thousand in Leeds. Privies, without doors, were frequently shared by dozens of people. Sleeping three, four or more to a bed was common. Cholera, typhus and other fevers were rife.

In 1844 Friedrich Engels, one of the founders of modern Communism, wrote *The Condition of the Working Class in England* and described many horrors, among them a view of the Irk in Manchester:

At the bottom flows, or rather stagnates, the Irk, a narrow, coal-black, foul-smelling stream full of debris and refuse which it deposits on the shallower right bank. In dry weather, a long string of the most disgusting, blackish-green, slime pools are left standing on this bank, from the depths of which bubbles of miasmatic gas constantly arise and give forth a stench unendurable even on the bridge forty or fifty feet above the surface of the stream. . . . It may be easily imagined, therefore, what sort of residue the stream deposits. Below the bridge you look upon the piles of debris, the refuse, filth and offal from the courts on the steep left bank; here each house is packed close behind its neighbour and a piece of each is visible, all black, smoky, crumbling, ancient, with broken panes and window frames. . . . Here the background embraces the pauper burial-ground, the station of the Liverpool and Leeds Railway, and in the rear of this, the Workhouse, the 'Poor-Law Bastille' of Manchester, which, like a citadel, looks threateningly down from behind its high walls and parapets on the hilltop upon the working people's quarter below.

A horde of ragged women and children swarm about as filthy as the swine that thrive upon the garbage heaps and in the puddles. . . . The race that lives in these ruinous cottages behind broken windows mended with oilskin, sprung doors and rotten door-posts, or in dark wet cellars in measureless filth and stench . . . must really have reached the lowest stage of humanity. . . . In each of these pens



Cross Templar Street, Leeds in the 1890s.

Homes of Manchester cotton workers during the cotton famine, 1862.



containing at most two rooms, a garret and perhaps a cellar, on the average twenty human beings live. . . . For each one hundred and twenty persons, one usually inaccessible privy is provided; and in spite of all the preachings of the physicians, in spite of the excitement into which the cholera epidemic plunged the sanitary police by reason of the condition of Little Ireland, in spite of everything, in this year of grace, 1844, it is in almost the same state as in 1831.

Crusade for cleanliness

It was not quite accurate to suggest, as Engels does, that nothing was being done. Much of our knowledge of similar terrible conditions comes from official reports, like the *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain* (1842):

Liverpool contains a multitude of inhabited cellars, close and damp, with no drains nor any convenience, and these pest-houses are constantly filled with fever. Some time ago I visited a poor woman in distress, the wife of a labouring man. She had been confined only a few days and herself and infant were lying on straw in a vault thro the outer cellar, with a clay floor impervious to water. There was no light or ventilation in it and the air was dreadful. I had to walk on bricks across the floor to reach her bedside, as the floor itself was flooded with stagnant water. This is by no means an extraordinary case, for I have witnessed scenes equally wretched.

It is little wonder that babies born in such conditions rapidly died: elsewhere, the Report gives some startling figures of deaths.

The author of this Report, Edwin Chadwick, was one of the great driving forces in improving matters. He hammered away at the consequences to everyone of the dirt and disease in the slums. A brilliant, arrogant, intolerable man, he antagonized many powerful people by his crusade for cleanliness, but he did gradually get results. He and his medical officers knew what it meant to fight typhus and cholera.

Fever might spread

In 1838 Chadwick's colleague, Dr Southwood Smith, had already warned in the fourth report of the Poor Law Commission that fever produced in the slums could 'spread to the better streets in the immediate neighbourhood, and thence to still wider and more airy streets, and ultimately to the most remote streets and the great squares'.

Similar reports were made about conditions in other slums. In 1846 the Nuisances Removal Act tried to define dwellings that were unfit for occupation and to give medical officers of health power to do something about them. Two years later, the Public Health Act dramatically extended these powers. The General Board of Health was set up under Chadwick along with local Boards of Health to supervise sanitary arrangements in each district. It was the first real acknowledgement of the Government's responsibility for public health, short-lived in this form, but a start.

The whole emphasis was on dangers to health — emphasizing the danger to people *not* living in the slums, rather than the housing needs of the slum dwellers. Houses were emptied because they were unfit for habitation. There was no regard that this further increased the overcrowding that had made people live there in the first place. The jobs and money were in the towns. People came regardless of the conditions, and stayed regardless of the health officials.

Individual action

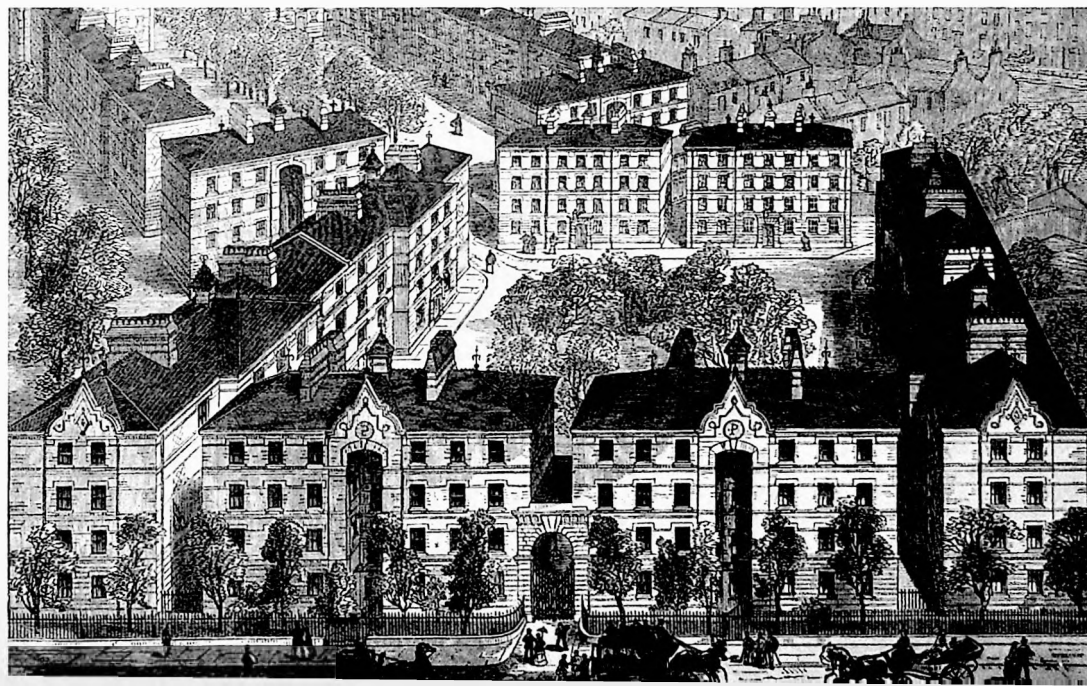
Alongside this negative approach to bad housing there were attempts to see if better housing could be built. Still to make a profit, but certainly better. The Society for Improving the Conditions of the Labouring Classes was founded in 1844 and the Prince Consort himself took an interest. They showed what could be done at the Great Exhibition of 1851. The 'model cottages' proudly displayed there were in fact

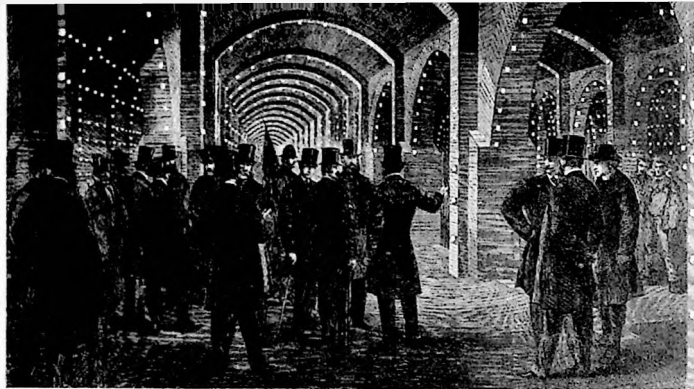
erected again at Kennington Park — they're still there. A few years later Octavia Hill was vigorously campaigning on slightly different lines. She took over existing houses, improved them and then let rooms out at low rents. She described her methods and outlook in *Homes of the London Poor*. Nevertheless, activity of this sort and of similar organizations such as the Peabody Trust and the Improved Industrial Dwellings Co. was puny in the face of slum houses numbered in millions.

Practically no one suggested that providing good housing might be beyond the power of private individuals. The freedom of the individual to build where and how and at what price he thought fit was still accepted, except where the health consequences of allowing this had become clear.



Peabody Dwellings were never quite as splendid as enthusiastic artists made them look (below), but they were a great improvement on the slums they replaced. Unfortunately they are very solidly built and although times have changed many of these buildings remain virtually the same.





The Prince of Wales opening the Metropolitan main-drainage works at Crossness. The underground reservoir was illuminated for the occasion.

Official action

The 1875 Public Health Act showed a decisive change of emphasis — from the rights of the individual to the needs of the public. Disraeli defended it against sneers that statecraft had become sewerage:

I ventured to say a short time ago that the health of the people was the most important subject for a statesman. It is a large subject. It has many branches. It involves the state of the dwellings of the people, the moral consequences of which are not less considerable than the physical. It involves their enjoyment of some of the chief elements of nature — air, light and water. It involves the regulations of their industry, the inspection of their toil. It involves the purity of their provisions . . . it is not a policy of sewerage but a question of life and death.

In addition, the Labourers' Dwellings Acts between 1866 and 1868 allowed local authorities to demolish insanitary dwellings and replace them by houses specially built for workers. The following year they could acquire whole slum districts. Although it was only a very small beginning, it showed a revolutionary change of attitude — a man's house was no longer just something that gave a landlord the biggest possible profit. It was recognized as a basic need that might have to be provided by the State.

The dawning recognition of such a need is not the same thing as actually doing something about it. The Dwellings Acts were only 'permissive' — the local authorities were allowed to exercise these powers, but they did not have to if they did not want to.

Some authorities acted vigorously. In Birmingham forty acres of slums were cleared and laid out in

new streets of 'artisans' dwellings' and open spaces. The driving force was Joseph Chamberlain, Mayor of Birmingham at thirty-seven, an ambitious young hardware merchant with a monocle and alarming Radical ideas. There was an explosion of civic activities — a free library, art gallery, parks and public buildings. Chamberlain was determined that ordinary people should be able to live decently in his city. A social conscience, ambition and the response of working-class voters helped him continue to enlarge his civic responsibilities.

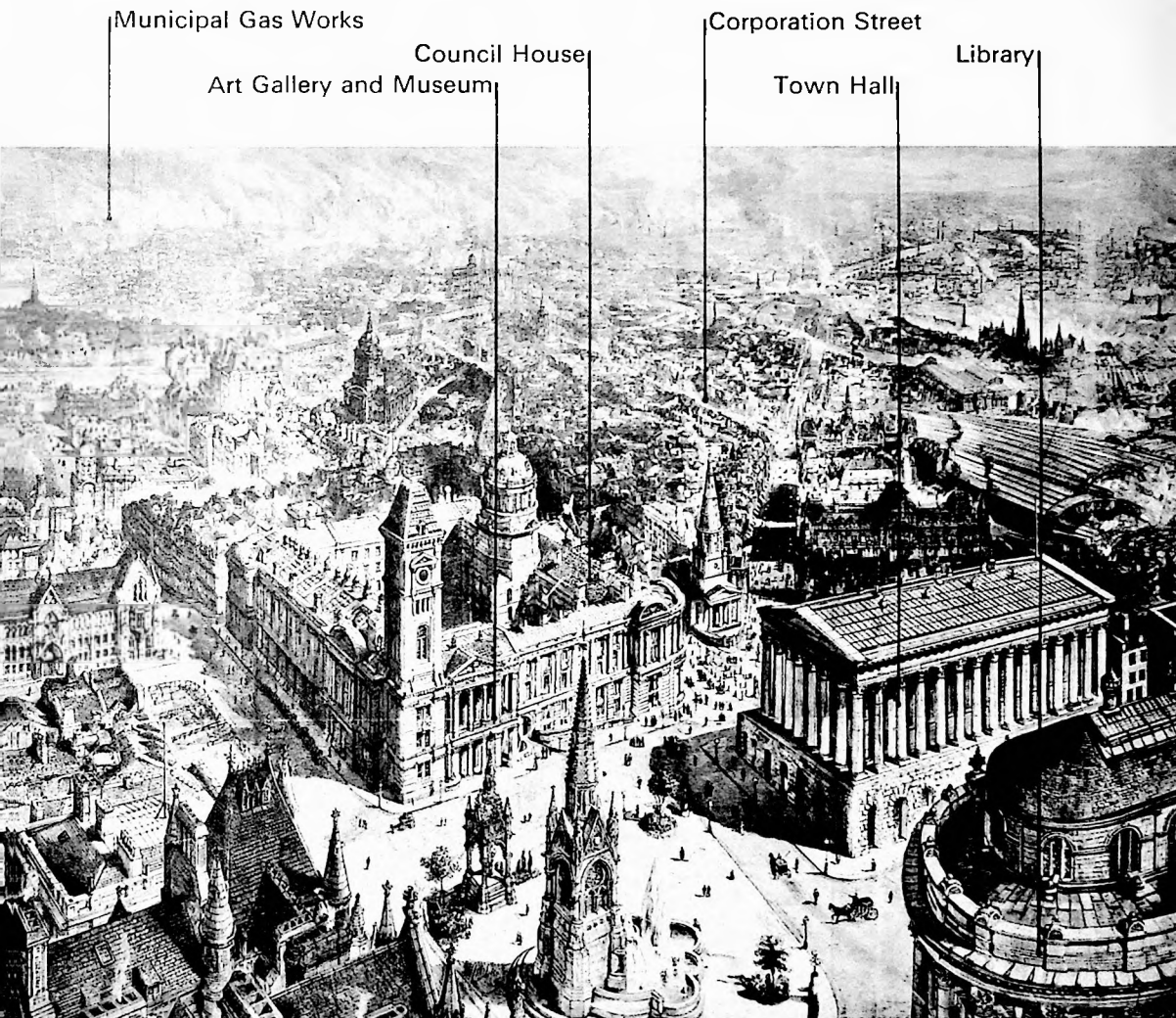
This was not the case everywhere. The Dwellings Acts were little used. The standards they set could be evaded by jerry builders or ignored by corrupt or lazy councils.

It was still much easier for local councils to see housing as essentially a health problem, tackled by measures like banning cellar dwellings. They drew up bye-laws to improve the standard of new buildings, but they seldom built houses themselves. For one thing, the financial cost to local authorities of large-scale building was daunting. Moreover, the idea of 'self-help' had not been banished — it was still widely believed that people lived in slums by choice so that they could squander their money on drink or gambling.

The tug of war continued. On the one hand, uneasiness about both the cost and desirability of official action; on the other, unrest and passionate exposures of the slum situation that demanded such action. In 1883 the Reverend Andrew Mearns published *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London*, only twenty pages, selling for a penny. Its language, its straightforward attack on the slum problem and the inaction about it had a

Joseph Chamberlain's Birmingham. When he became Mayor, Chamberlain bought the gas and waterworks for the city, reducing the price of gas and making the water purer, cheaper and more plentiful. He put in hand plans for better education. Above all, he showed what could be done in slum clearance and town planning by a determined Corporation.

One curiosity of this 1886 picture is the amount of smoke proudly pouring from the factories. Purer water maybe, but few people regarded smoke as particularly harmful. 'The healthiest thing in the world in all respects and particularly for the lungs', Mr Bounderby called it in Dickens's novel *Hard Times*.

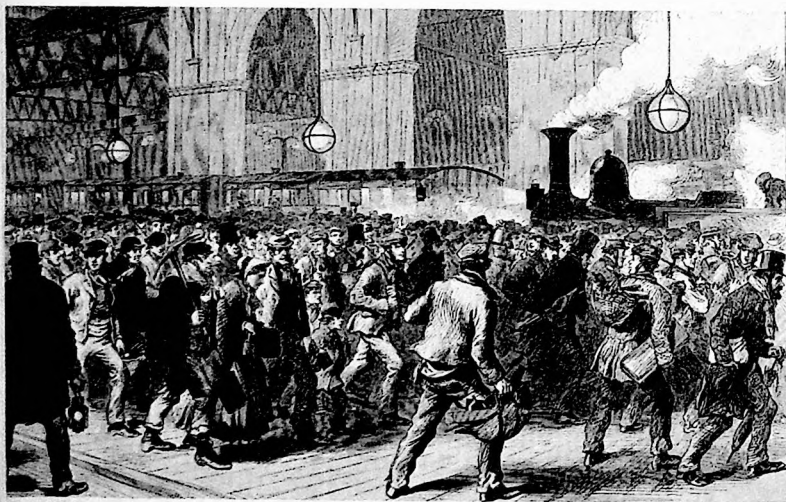


sensational effect — it triggered off an impassioned discussion among politicians and churchmen and in the newspapers. Within a few months the Government appointed the Royal Commission on the Housing of the Working Classes.

The full complexity of the housing problem was beginning to be realized. Working-class people were needed in large numbers at the centre of cities to keep all the services going. The conditions they found there to live in were intolerable. Sidney Webb, a famous social reformer, remarked to the Commission that eight million people were being housed, washed and watered worse than horses. It was true, and remained true for many years. It was not just the health risk of bad building — no drainage and so on — there was quite simply the overcrowding of too many people, who all needed to be there. One answer had been the introduction of workmen's fares on the railways — cheap early morning fares so that working people could

afford to live further out and still work in the centre. This relieved the pressure to a certain extent, but it could not solve the basic problem.

The real solution was an extremely unattractive one — the local authorities must buy up the slums from the slum landlords (at high prices) and then improve or rebuild them to let to slum tenants (at low rents). They already had the power to do this. Not surprisingly, what was lacking was the desire to find the money to bridge the gap between what they would spend and what they would get back in rents. The Royal Commission recognized this. It urged more action, but it had no solution for the terrible financial problems involved. The more slums a local authority had, the more crippling the burden on the rates for everyone else living in that community. But, if rents were raised for the new housing, they were too high for those who had been cleared out of the slum which was there before.



A Workmen's Penny Train arrives at Victoria, 1865.



On the London County Council's first major scheme at Boundary Street in Bethnal Green (1890–1900), the cost of demolition alone worked out around £300 per family. What happened, therefore, both here and elsewhere, was that the poorest people could not afford the new rents. Those who had been moved out added to the overcrowding somewhere else in London. The same thing sometimes happens with slum clearance even today.

George Cadbury knew the wretched housing of central Birmingham (p. 36). When he moved his factory out of the city he was able to built well-planned houses for his workers at Bournville. He saw that the houses had large gardens, open spaces left as parks and that factories were kept separate from houses.



Thousands of miners (and others) still live in houses like those Orwell described. A tenant of the National Coal Board shows 'His' and 'Hers' tin baths at his home in South Wales in 1969.

'Homes fit for heroes'

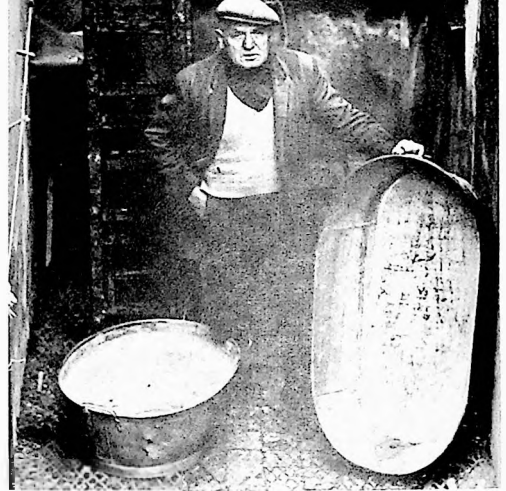
The First World War gave a new urgency to the problem. It both interrupted building and changed people's attitudes. Having won the war, the social evils at home must also be defeated. The fighting men must come back to 'homes fit for heroes'.

Who would build them? There had been no house building during the war and rents had been frozen by law at their pre-war level. Costs had gone up and there was no profit for private builders if they had to let at the frozen rents. But it was these rents which, despite the rise in other prices, people were now coming to think of as representing the true value of their homes.

Local authorities were instructed to make surveys of the housing in their areas and build houses where they were found to be needed. The houses they built were then to be let at rents related *not* to the cost of building, but firstly, to the tenants' ability to pay, and secondly, to rents for similar accommodation in old houses. The loss, above a certain amount, would be made up by a 'subsidy' from the government. The loss, as might have been expected, was substantial and the scheme was modified in 1923. In future the government gave local authorities a fixed 'subsidy' each year to meet the difference between the cost of building and the income from letting. Two important principles had been introduced. Housing was let at a 'fair rent' related to people's earnings and not to the cost of building. House building was a responsibility of the government (through local authorities) as well as of private individuals. Both ideas still govern our attitude to housing.

Houses to go round

The principles were valuable. The housing many people had to live in between the wars remained grim, as the author, George Orwell, found on a visit to the



North of England, which he described in *The Road to Wigan Pier*, published in 1937:

You might walk, I suppose, through literally hundreds of miles of streets inhabited by miners, every one of whom, when he is in work, gets black from head to foot every day, without ever passing a house in which one could have a bath. It would have been very simple to install a hot-water system working from the kitchen range, but the builder saved perhaps ten pounds on each house by not doing so, and at the time when these houses were built no one imagined that miners wanted baths.

For it is to be noted that the majority of these houses are old, fifty or sixty years old at least, and great numbers of them are by any ordinary standard not fit for human habitation. They go on being tenanted simply because there are no others to be had. And that is the central fact about housing in the industrial areas: not that the houses are poky and ugly, and insanitary and comfortless, or that they are distributed in incredibly filthy slums round belching foundries and stinking canals and slag-heaps that deluge them with sulphurous smoke — though all this is perfectly true — but simply that there are not enough houses to go round.

What this meant was that people would put up with anything, however damp and decayed, simply to get a roof over their heads:

I have been into appalling houses, houses in which I would not live a week if you paid me, and found that the tenants had been there twenty and thirty years and only hoped they might have the luck to die there.

At the end of the Second World War 'squatters' barricaded themselves into hotels and other buildings because of the housing shortage. Four million homes had been destroyed or damaged during the War.



Faced by this shortage, the local authorities could 'condemn' a house, but they could not order it to be pulled down until the tenant had another house to go to:

In a town like Wigan, for instance, there are over two thousand houses standing which have been condemned for years, and whole sections of the town would be condemned *en bloc* if there were any hope of other houses being built to replace them.

Local authorities *were* building houses. They were short of money and suitable sites, but the housing estates were going up. They still are.

The Second World War produced all the same problems as the first, but even more acutely. Not only was there no building during the war, but vast numbers of homes were destroyed in air raids. The cost of building increased a great deal after the war and the cost of land to build on rocketed because it was so scarce. Moreover, as so often after a war, people wished to make a fresh start at a higher level. They expected houses to be better, but not to cost more.

Landlords and rent control

No new solutions were found by the post-war Labour government, and none have been found since. However, council house building was encouraged by subsidies and cheap loans to enable local councils to charge cheap rents. There was tax relief on mort-

gages for people wanting to buy their own houses. Rents of most private houses continued to be controlled.

This last was a very vexed point. Obviously it is wrong to allow landlords to exploit a housing shortage by charging very high rents, but when the problem is one of shortage, rent control worsens this. It then becomes unprofitable for private individuals to build houses or flats for renting. The 1951 Conservative government was anxious to increase the amount of housing available. It stepped up the numbers built. It also wanted to encourage landlords to keep existing houses in good repair, which was often impossible at the rents they were getting. So, in 1957, a Rent Act freed certain house rents from control and let them rise to a level more in line with building costs and current prices.

As so often with new laws about housing it solved some problems but produced others. In particular it led to very serious abuses that came to be known as 'Rachmanism', after Peter Rachman, the notorious landlord who took advantage of the section of this Rent Act which allowed a landlord to increase the rent for a new tenant. 'Rachmanism' was really the discovery that you could buy up large houses very cheaply if they were let out at low rents, and then — in any way you could — force the original tenants out so as to sell or relet at a large profit.



Two aspects of controlled rents. Peter Rachman (left) bought up large London houses cheaply because they had tenants paying controlled rents. A handsome profit could be made by getting rid of the tenants — by fair means or foul — and re-selling the house. Mrs Raum (right) maintained that the £3 a week her tenant paid her was not enough to keep the property in repair. She evicted the tenant and the magistrate found her guilty. The demonstrations and publicity made it clear that, nevertheless, Mrs Raum had many sympathizers.



The 1965 Rent Act attempted to remedy these abuses without going back to all the disadvantages of complete rent control. It restored security of tenure — no one could be evicted without a County Court Order, and then only on certain conditions such as alternative accommodation being available or the landlord needing the house for his own use. There were strong penalties laid down for any sort of 'Rachmanism'. The heart of the Act, however, was a new concept, a 'regulated' tenancy. The tenant (or the landlord) could ask for a 'fair rent' to be determined by a Rent Assessment Officer in relation to rents for similar housing. Exorbitant rents, produced by lack of accommodation, were scaled down to more reasonable levels. Equally, of course, unreasonably low rents could be put up. The Act did not immediately apply to the very low rents that had been 'controlled' for years, but provision was made for it to extend to them.

The 1969 Housing Act ingeniously linked these rents to the state of repair. Controlled tenancies at very low rents really prevented a landlord from doing repairs; the Act provided that these could be turned into regulated tenancies at 'fair rates' once they were certified as in adequate repair. The Act therefore dramatically increased the incentive to improve old housing. A survey had revealed for the first time exactly how widespread substandard housing was. Landlords are now given much better grants to install basic amenities like bathrooms and hot water systems, plus the incentive of higher rents.

It is too soon to tell how the Act will work, but it could provide better homes for millions of people

without the horrific cost of tearing down and rebuilding. It could also be a way out of the problems of rent control that have bedevilled housing for half a century.

Rent and income

Meanwhile, things were changing in council house rents. Many council tenants could genuinely only afford a very low rent, but there was a gradually increasing demand that others, who could pay more, should do so. Of course, if you are *used* to paying a low rent this tends to become the rent you feel you *should* pay. But council houses are often allocated to people not because they are particularly poor, but because they were previously overcrowded or had a large family or were in poor health. Perhaps the area in which they were living was being redeveloped and the council undertook to rehouse them. All of these are good reasons for providing a home for a family, but not necessarily at a rock-bottom rent. Councils started to draw up differential rent schemes based on family income. Such schemes were not by any means introduced without protest — council house tenants are well placed to organize protests and many did.

It is, after all, a very debatable question how much of your income you ought to spend on rent. Before the First World War a worker spent roughly 15p on rent out of every £1 of income. By the 1950s it averaged only less than 7p out of every £1 of income because of controls and subsidies. Probably this is too low a proportion, but it is very difficult to change people's attitudes to what they have become used to, especially

A demonstration in February 1970 against the Greater London Council's decision to raise council rents. Official bodies are at least vulnerable to public pressure.

if it is to their advantage. But if rents were higher there might be more housing available, both council estates and private.

Many local councils certainly felt this by the late 1960s. Council housing absorbed vast sums of money — could this be better spent? After all many of the poorest tenants do not live in council property at all. For a council tenant to pay, say, £3 for three bedrooms, a sitting-room, kitchen and bathroom while someone earning less pays £7 for a single room (sharing a lavatory with three other families) is against all justice. If council rents are raised to a higher level, families in need of help can be given rebates while those able to pay in full do so. The money saved is, at least in theory, available either to build more council housing or even to give some kind of help to private tenants (though how to do this is a lot less clear). The argument has gathered force that councils should 'subsidize families not houses'.

Buying a house

It might seem that someone *buying* a house would need no help from the Welfare State. After all, they have to spend several thousand pounds, so they are not 'poor' in any ordinary sense. In fact, the help given by the State to house owners runs into millions of pounds a year.

Most people do not buy a house outright — they can't afford to. They have to borrow the money, probably from a building society, and pay interest on the loan. The government helps by refunding income tax on the money paid out as interest. The result is that the richer you are and the more expensive your house, the greater the help you get. If you pay little or no tax, you get little or no relief.

In recent years house prices and interest rates have got higher. The income needed to buy a house of your own has therefore steadily gone up too. Many people



who once could have afforded a house now can't. A building society normally reckons that a mortgage should not amount to more than two and a half to three times your yearly income, so a man earning £1000 a year could hope to borrow at most £2500 to £3000. But in many parts of the country it is very difficult to get houses and flats in this price-range.

In 1968 the government introduced the Option Mortgage Scheme. People on low incomes, and therefore paying little tax, could choose to forego the tax relief in return for paying a lower rate of interest to the building society. The government makes up the difference. This should have enabled many thousands more people to buy a house, but initially most of the advantage was wiped out by even higher prices and interest rates.

Planning ahead

After a century of effort and the building of millions of council houses, it would still be over-optimistic to think that the housing problem is either solved or near solution. Despite these massive efforts hideous slums still mar the cities and harm those who live in them. Shelter, the group campaigning for the homeless and badly housed, has spotlighted bad conditions in pamphlets like *Back to School from a Holiday in the Slums*.

unfit for habitation. There are nearly four million homes that are without either a lavatory indoors, or a bathroom, or running hot water, or several of these basic amenities. Altogether these substandard homes amount to a quarter of all the homes in England and Wales. The diagram shows the percentage of homes in each region lacking various amenities. These pictures show the kind of cramped conditions in which three families have to live. Here are three other stories from the millions that could be told.

brother in two rooms. There is no hot water in the house. Pauline wants to stay on at school and train to become a nurse, but this is going to create problems of doing homework. She is determined to go ahead with it, but she has to share her bedroom with her sister and brother, and this room also contains the television. She says it is impossible to have a room by herself at any time. 'I can't ask everyone to get out of the room so that I can do my homework, can I?' she says. *Pauline was interviewed by a SHELTER researcher near her home in Notting Hill*

was bronchitic, and had a fearful attendance record. Through contact with the welfare department I learned, quite by chance, that he had to sleep by the Ideal Boiler in the kitchen/living room in a basement. There was one other room in the 'flat', and this, with a screen in it, served as bedroom for his two teenage sisters and his parents.

When he used to fall asleep in the classroom, as he often did, I used to think of the previous evening, of the boy waiting for his parents to retire to their overcrowded room so that he could himself get some rest — and I let him sleep. *Teacher in Kensington*



One four-year-old girl was admitted to a local nursery school unable to walk. The family lived in one room and their only form of heating was oil heaters. A neighbour's child in similar circumstances had been badly burned when she knocked over a heater, so the mother of this girl kept her in a cot all day for safety!

She was terrified that if she did not keep her daughter safe in this way she would be burned too. The nursery school taught the girl to walk, with success. But now, two years later, she is more like a four-year-old than a six-year-old.

A Birmingham primary-school teacher

Lack of amenities 1967

	internal w.c.	fixed bath	wash basin	hot . at th
The North	25%	17%	22%	
The South-East	11%	9%	16%	
Rest of England and Wales	20%	14%	20%	

The figures are percentages of the homes in the area that lack the amenity shown



The conditions Shelter attacks are not some distant nineteenth-century nightmare; they are London and Birmingham today. Until housing like this is a thing of the past, many children will never have a reasonable chance in life — they will be part of what a teacher in North Kensington described as 'a heart-breaking stream of lost opportunities, of lives ruined before they ever truly started'.

It is easy to say 'anything is better than that — build and build quickly'. That was said in many places immediately after the war — and people are still living with the results. Housing is depressingly durable. A badly-sited or poorly-designed block may still be an eyesore in sixty years' time. A development by a pinch-penny council, making petty savings here and there, may be a slum five years after it is built. It deteriorates while people's standards rise.

In the next few years there will no longer be an actual shortage of houses and flats. Fine. The only trouble is that many of them are in the wrong parts of the country and many of them are in a terrible state of repair.

It is very difficult to plan ahead on housing — to make sure that what you build today will serve the needs of tomorrow. People move from one part of the country to another. Empty houses in Aberdeen will not help overcrowding in Acton. People's patterns of life alter. You need more (and smaller) houses if people marry young and have small families, than if they marry late and have large ones. If people live longer, you need more special housing for elderly people, and so on. A sane housing policy has to be aware of a multitude of factors like these, if it is to house everyone decently today without creating further slums tomorrow.

There are no simple solutions. But that does not mean that we need be driven into a despairing acceptance that there will always be bad housing. There has



This disaster to the twenty-three storey Ronan Point tower block in 1968, when an explosion caused several floors to collapse, created alarm about many high blocks of flats. But there is plenty to be said against them on other grounds — especially the inadequate facilities for small children in most of them.

been progress. The conditions against which Shelter is campaigning are much less horrifying than those seen by the Royal Commission in 1884, which in turn were less horrifying than those described by Engels in 1844. The problem can be tackled, but it will need more determination, more imagination and more money than has been shown for much of the past century.

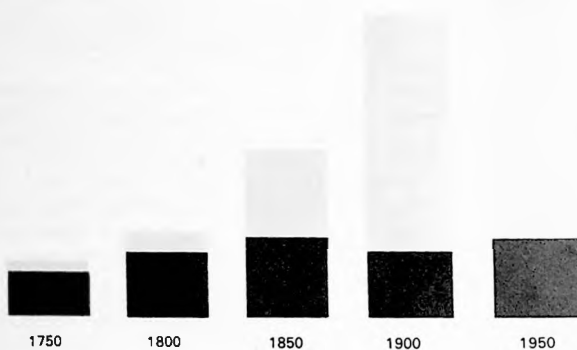
Housing

An Englishman's home, they say, is his castle. For anyone, English or not, the home is the single most important and most expensive thing in his life. Yet not all countries and cultures think of housing in the same way. In England solidity and privacy have always seemed the most important things: in place of the apartment buildings of Paris or Edinburgh, the English ideal has always been row on row of mini-cottages, where possible with their own front door and a postage-stamp garden. Gradually, however, all the industrialized nations are having to move towards the same kind of solution: high-rise and high-density blocks in the cities, or in new towns with daily access to the cities. Can planners really make this environment tolerable for most people?

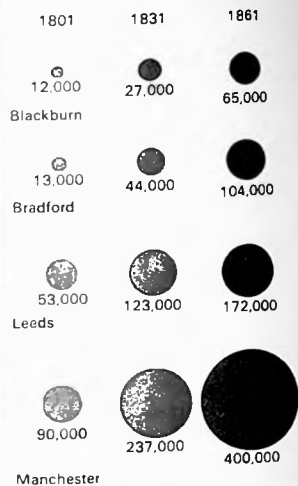
- 1838** The Fourth Report of the Poor Law Commission published. It included descriptions of fever in London slums.
- 1842** Chadwick's report, *The Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain*, published. It contained startling statistics on disease and death in the slums, and sparked off the movement to make the State accept responsibility for public health.
- 1844** The Society for Improving the Conditions of the Labouring Classes founded. 'Model cottages' designed by the Society were displayed at the Great Exhibition in 1851.
- 1846** The Nuisances Removal Act was the first attempt to define conditions unfit to live in and to try and deal with them.
- 1848** The first Public Health Act set up a national Board of Health in London under Chadwick and local boards in other towns.
- 1862** The Peabody Trust established the building of houses for the poor at low rents. This was followed by a campaign by Octavia Hill to improve existing houses for poor tenants.
- 1866–8** Labourers' Dwellings Acts made public money available for the building of labourers' houses.
- 1873–5** Joseph Chamberlain, Mayor of Birmingham, had wide-scale slum clearance and building of labourers' houses carried out.
- 1875** Artisans and Labourers' Dwellings Improvement Act allowed local authorities to clear slum districts and to build and let their own houses. This was the beginning of council houses as we know them today, but little was actually done, partly because the cost of compensation was too high. This law was strengthened by succeeding Acts in 1890 and 1919.
- 1875** The Public Health Act in this year introduced a nation-wide system of public health under the Local Government Board. It also allowed local authorities to make bye-laws to govern building standards, and banned cellar dwellings.
- 1885** Royal Commission on the Housing of the Working Classes revealed the shortage of suitable housing for working people, and the resulting overcrowding. It also pointed out the limitations of existing laws to check slums.
- 1890** The Housing of the Working Classes Act extended the existing powers of local authorities to clear slums and build houses. This Act resulted in greater activity.
- 1892** First volumes published of Charles Booth's *Life and Labour of the People in London*. A very detailed survey of poverty in London which includes many descriptions of the way in which the poor suffered from disease, bad housing and a defective public health system.
- 1909** Housing and Town Planning Act gave the government the power to *force* local authorities to carry out slum clearance.
- 1914** Increase of Rent and Mortgage Interest (Restrictions) Act marked the beginning of rent control by establishing a limit to the rent of small houses. It also protected the tenants from eviction. Exact limits on rent were altered by subsequent Acts.
- 1919** The Housing Act in this year provided for varying subsidies from the government to encourage the building of workers' houses by local authorities. These subsidies were altered by subsequent Acts in 1923, 1924 and 1930.
- 1957** The Rent Act in this year decontrolled the rent of houses paying more than £40 a year in rates, and allowed substantial increases in rents that remained controlled.
- 1957** The Housing Act in this year laid down a standard for overcrowding. Every dwelling house is allowed a certain maximum number of people who may sleep there, e.g. three people is the maximum number for a two-roomed dwelling (the minimum size of room for a baby, a child and an adult is also specified).
- 1958** Housing (Financial Provisions) Act provided grants for improvements to private houses.
- 1965** The Rent Act in this year provided protection from eviction, and rent assessment officers to determine 'fair rents'.
- 1969** The Housing Act in this year linked the rent of a house to its state of repair in order to increase the incentive to improve old housing. It gave much higher grants to install bathrooms etc. in substandard housing.

1 Population growth

town
country



2 Growth of towns



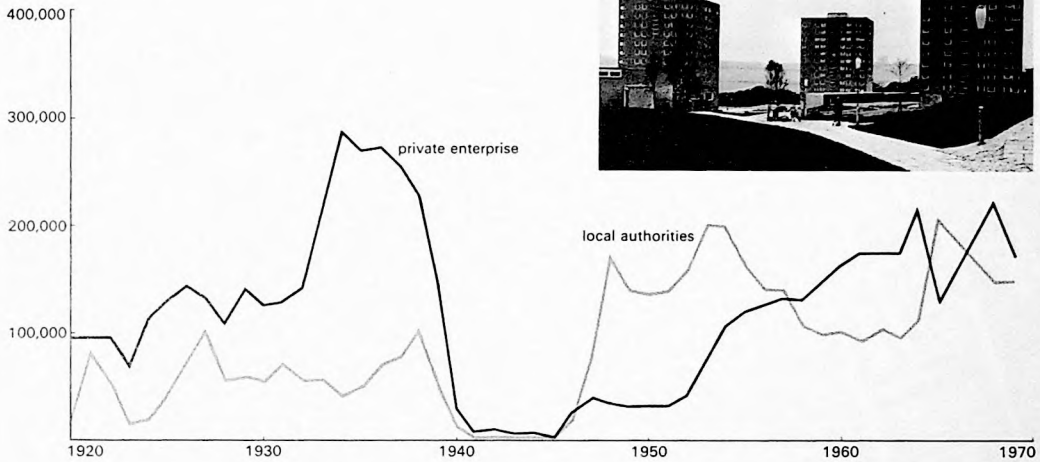
3 Density of population 1961 per square mile



4 Movement of population 1951-61



5 Dwellings built



People and their homes

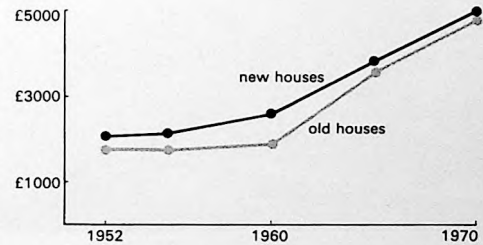
The statistics on this page are about housing — they mean more houses, houses in different areas, houses in towns rather than the country, houses where there is little room to build them. Some of the results can be seen on pp. 30–31 and pp. 36–7 (p. 70 may also suggest reasons for 4).

1, 2, 3, 4 all affect the demand for housing — they mean more houses, houses in different areas, houses in towns rather than the country, houses where there is little room to build them. Some of the results can be seen on pp. 30–31 and pp. 36–7 (p. 70 may also suggest reasons for 4).

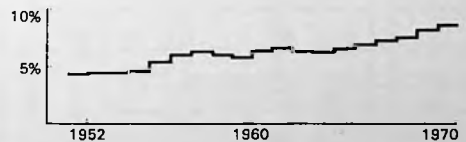
Broadly speaking, houses are built by private developers to sell or local authorities to rent (5). This diagram shows the different numbers of each. Conservative governments tend to favour one and Labour governments the other.

6 and 7 determine whether people can afford to buy their own homes.

6 Average house prices



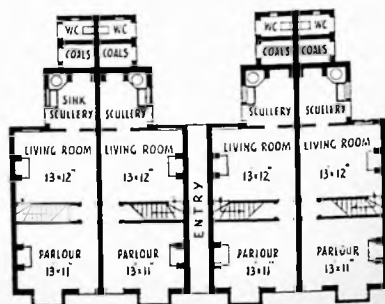
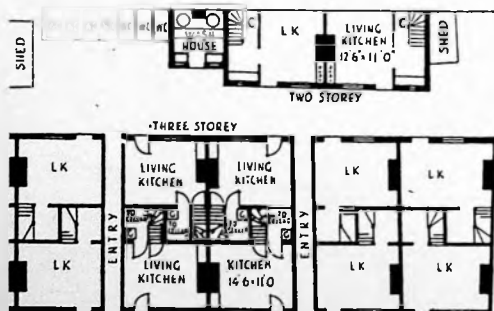
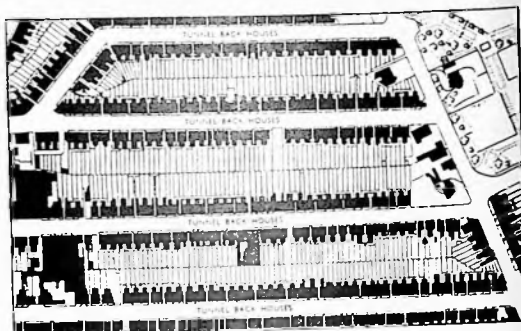
7 Mortgage interest rate



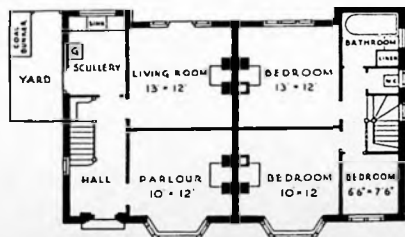
In most cities you will find decaying older housing at the centre and successive rings of newer housing marking each stage of the city's spread outwards. At some point the costly and complicated business of redevelopment starts, and again this is usually from the centre working out.

Birmingham grew rapidly during the Industrial Revolution. Houses and factories huddled together with no regard for town planning, ventilation or sanitation. At the start of the Second World War there were still 38,000 back-to-back houses like this.

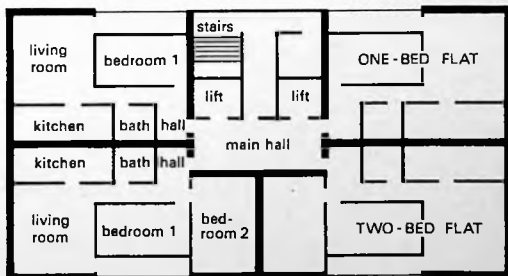
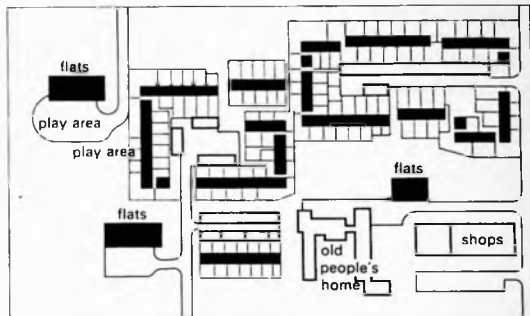
Surrounding the centre of the city there is a ring of tens of thousands of 'tunnel-back' houses, conforming to certain health standards but monotonous, cramped and without a bathroom or indoor lavatory.



Further out, the housing estates built between the First and Second World Wars. More space, gardens, proper sanitation. But a long way from work and often now run down in appearance because of cheap materials.



The latest phase of council building in Birmingham as elsewhere is mainly tower blocks. Thought has been given to layout and amenities, but the problems of bringing up young children in high flats can be very great.



3 'Workers of the world'

No safeguards

If the conditions in which many people lived in the early nineteenth century were horrifying, the conditions in which they worked were almost beyond belief. It is difficult today to imagine those harsh and oppressive times, when there were no safeguards of any sort about who worked, for how long, for how much or in what conditions. There were no trade unions, no safety standards in factories, no laws governing hours of work.

If you didn't like the work you could try and find another job, or starve. If work was no longer available, the same. If you were injured at work, you got no compensation. If your health was ruined and your life shortened by your work — the fumes or the dust or the cramped and crippling conditions — that was just part of the way things were.

Once again, as with housing, the prevailing spirit was self-help and *laissez-faire*. A man had his labour, his capacity to work, to sell; another man had the money and resources to buy that labour; no one must interfere with whatever bargain they freely reached between them. That was the theory. The fact that it was a very unequal piece of bargaining, with all the advantages on the side of the employer, was ignored. Any interference with the bargain would, it was argued, force up costs, endanger the whole system of manufacturing, and so slow down the creation of wealth that the manufacturing achieved. Therefore, since the quickest possible creation of wealth benefited everyone, it wouldn't really help the working man if his hours and conditions of work were improved. It might appear to, but he too would suffer in the long run if businessmen were unable to sell their goods at a reasonable profit. This was how the arguments ran.

The result was conditions like those at Messrs John Brown & Company's Steel & Iron Works, Saville Street, Sheffield:

Masses of red hot metal, too heavy to be carried, are wheeled about, sometimes by boys. Just after my visit here, a bad accident happened at some works in the neighbourhood, a man slipping while wheeling a red hot railway wheel, which thus fell and lay on him, he, of course, being powerless to move it. Boys also drag red hot metal from the rollers. . . .

Mr Ellis, one of the firm, remarked:

We do not think that the work hurts boys' health. It is hot, but they can often rest, and have plenty to eat and drink. We do not find them subject to colds. Nor do they suffer from accidents by machinery or burns. The worst is, say, the loss of a finger. . . .

In Northampton, Wellington boots were frequently 'stabbed' by hand, often by children:

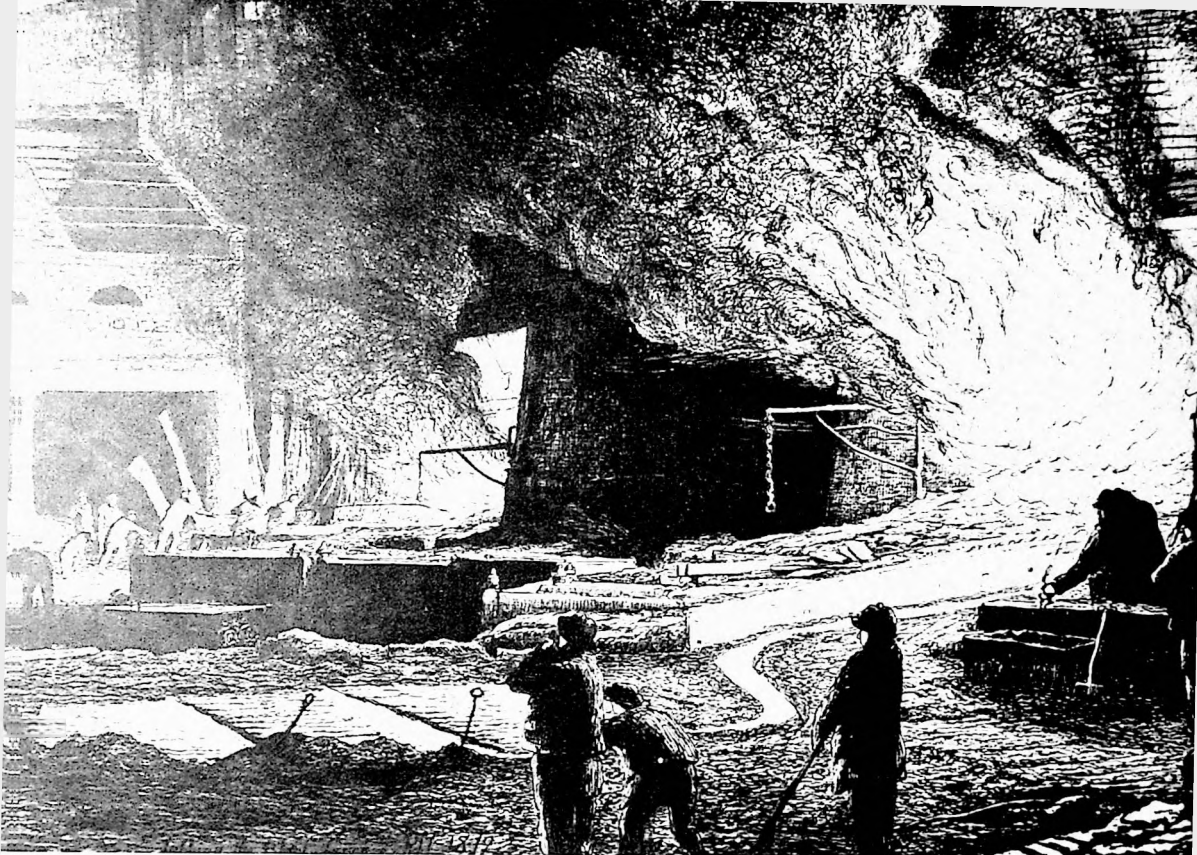
. . . the stabbing was laborious, required great attention, and was even dangerous, for they often sat so close that in drawing the thread with both hands, the awl, which was always held point outwards, in the right hand, not infrequently struck the next child in the face or eye; many have lost an eye in this way.

The Assistant Commissioner investigating these conditions added a note:

I have noticed, before seeing Mr Bostock, that several persons of both sexes, whom I met in the town, had lost an eye; but thinking it merely an odd coincidence, had not inquired about it, till Mr Bostock made the above remark.

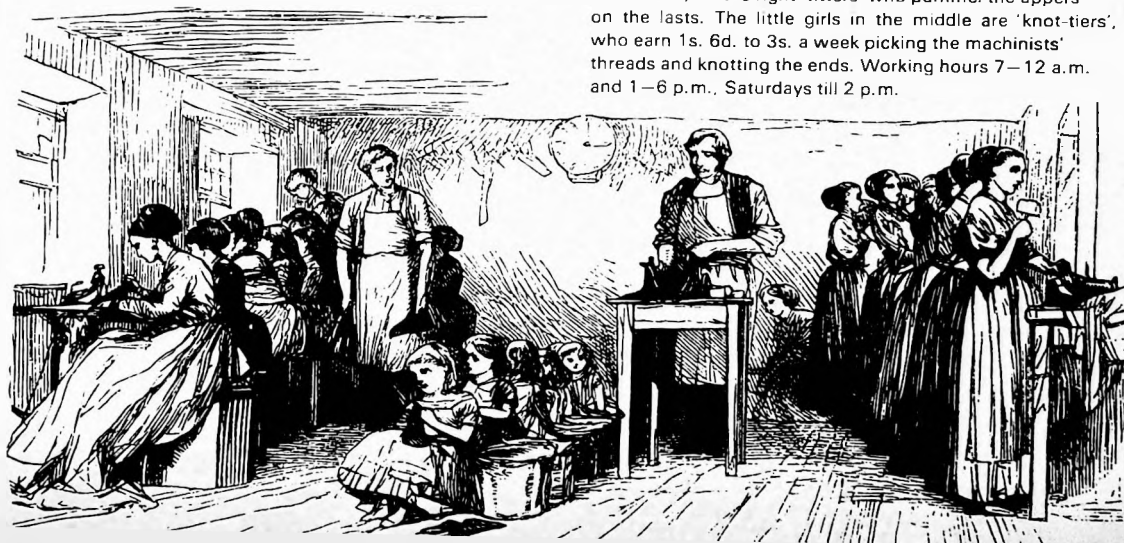
One of the most extraordinary aspects was how young many of the workers were. In 1863, the average age at which fifty-eight children in the pottery factories in Stoke-on-Trent had started work was nine years three months, and in Hanley it was eight years one month.

Before condemning too readily the outlook that made these things possible, it is as well to try to understand it. No one argued that it was *desirable*



An 1872 Blast Furnace — the chances of a horrific accident are clear to see.

An 1869 shoemakers factory in Northampton. On the left, machinists, on the right 'fitters' who pummel the uppers on the lasts. The little girls in the middle are 'knot-tiers', who earn 1s. 6d. to 3s. a week picking the machinists' threads and knotting the ends. Working hours 7—12 a.m. and 1—6 p.m., Saturdays till 2 p.m.



Engels, as one of the founders of the Communist Party and co-author with Karl Marx of *The Communist Manifesto*, could hardly be called the most impartial of observers. He may be exaggerating somewhat, and he obviously chooses the worst examples to make his case. Even so, historians have often been impressed by the accuracy of his accounts.

There are some branches of factory work which have an especially injurious effect. In many rooms of the cotton and flax-spinning mills, the air is filled with fibrous dust, which produces chest affections, especially among workers in the carding and combing-rooms. Some constitutions can bear it, some cannot; but the operative has no choice. He must take the room in which he finds work, whether his chest is sound or not. The most common effects of this breathing of dust are bloodspitting, hard, noisy breathing, pains in the chest, coughs, sleeplessness — in short, all the symptoms of asthma ending in the worst cases in consumption. Especially unwholesome is the wet spinning of linen-yarn which is carried on by young girls and boys. The water spirts over them from the spindle, so that the front of their clothing is constantly wet through to the skin; and there is always water standing on the floor. This is the case to a less degree in the doubling-rooms of the cotton mills, and the result is a constant succession of colds and affections of the chest. A hoarse, rough voice is common to all operatives, but especially to wet spinners and doublers. Stuart, Mackintosh and Sir D. Barry express themselves in the most vigorous terms as to the unwholesomeness of this work, and the small consideration shown by most of the manufacturers for the health of the girls who do it. Another effect of flax-spinning is a peculiar deformity of the shoulder, especially a projection of the right shoulder-blade, consequent upon the nature of the work. This sort of spinning and the throstle-spinning of cotton frequently produce diseases of the knee-pan, which is used to check the spindle during the joining of broken threads. The frequent stooping and the bending to the low machines common to both these branches of work have, in general, a stunting effect upon the growth of the operative. In the throstle-room of the cotton mill at Manchester, in which I was employed, I do not remember to have seen one single tall, well-built girl; they were all short, dumpy, and badly-

formed, decidedly ugly in the whole development of the figure. But apart from all these diseases and malformations, the limbs of the operatives suffer in still another way. The work between the machinery gives rise to multitudes of accidents of more or less serious nature, which have for the operative the secondary effect of unfitting him for his work more or less completely. The most common accident is the squeezing off of a single joint of a finger, somewhat less common the loss of the whole finger, half or a whole hand, an arm, etc., in the machinery. Lockjaw very often follows, even upon the lesser among these injuries, and brings death with it. Besides the deformed persons, a great number of maimed ones may be seen going about in Manchester; this one has lost an arm or a part of one, that one a foot, the third half a leg; it is like living in the midst of an army just returned from a campaign. But the most dangerous portion of the machinery is the strapping which conveys motive power from the shaft to the separate machines, especially if it contains buckles, which, however, are rarely used now. Whoever is seized by the strap is carried up with lightning speed, thrown against the ceiling above and floor below with such force that there is rarely a whole bone left in the body, and death follows instantly. Between 12 June and 3 August 1843, the *Manchester Guardian* reported the following serious accidents (the trifling ones it does not notice): 12 June a boy died in Manchester of lockjaw, caused by his hand being crushed between wheels. 16 June a youth in Saddleworth seized by a wheel and carried away with it; died, utterly mangled. 29 June a young man at Green Acres Moor, near Manchester, at work in a machine shop, fell under the grindstone, which broke two of his ribs and lacerated him terribly. 24 July a girl in Oldham died, carried around fifty times by a strap; no bone unbroken. 27 July a girl in Manchester seized by the blower (the first machine that receives the raw cotton), and died of injuries received. 3 August a bobbins turner died in Dukinfield, caught in a strap, every rib broken. In the year 1843, the Manchester infirmary treated 962 cases of wounds and mutilations caused by machinery.

from *The Condition of the Working Class in England*
by F. Engels (1844)

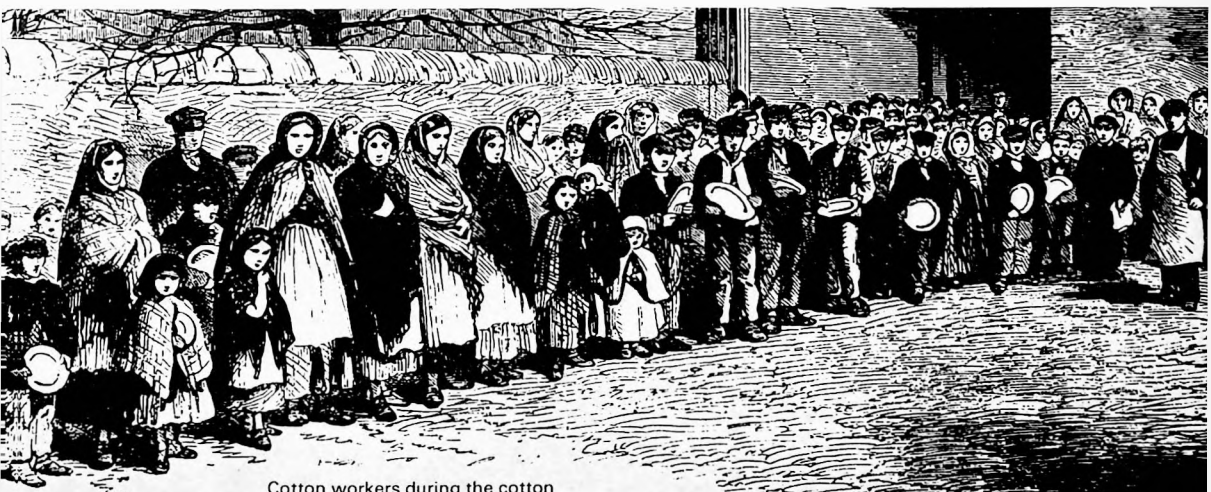
that small children crippled themselves in shoe factories, or that men died at the age of thirty through breathing in metal filings — these were regrettable aspects of what was felt to be basically a worthwhile system.

Perhaps it is revealing to compare today's attitudes to road accidents. No one thinks it desirable that twenty people should be killed every day on the roads — on the contrary, everyone agrees it is shocking, disturbing, demanding action, to be deplored, a grave problem to be tackled urgently. It is tackled, but not very urgently. There is no doubt that there could be fewer deaths. If the speed limit were not 30 m.p.h. but 10 m.p.h., there would be far fewer accidents and practically no serious ones. If manufacturers were forced to make cars with solid chassis and collapsible steering wheels, accidents would again be less serious. Neither of these measures seems likely to happen. We want to travel faster than 10 m.p.h. and manufacturers care more about cost and appearance than the highest possible safety standards. We put up with the accidents. In a sense, as society, we have chosen that

number of daily deaths and injuries as the price we are prepared to pay for the other benefits of the motor car.

Guilt and threat

In the same subconscious way, the Victorians accepted conditions in factories as the price of becoming a great industrial country. Though not all of them did. From early in the century reformers demanded that at least children and women should be to some extent safeguarded from the worst conditions. It was easier to get acceptance of the idea that they needed help against bad employers. Gradually, despite immense hostility from those who felt their profits depended on the existing system, reforms were achieved. They were achieved at first by the humanitarian instincts of particular individuals, such as Robert Owen or Lord Shaftesbury. Later, they were also achieved by the working people themselves and the gradually increasing power of their trade unions. Without the workers' struggle to organize themselves, many reforms would never have been achieved. It is sad that only occasionally the power-



Cotton workers during the cotton famine of 1862 waiting for breakfast.



ful and rich help the unfortunate through compassion; more often it is the threat of strikes or riots that produces action.

Social progress is normally a curious combination of guilt and threat. Those with power — employers, politicians, landlords, the wealthy and influential — become gradually disturbed by revelations of terrible conditions for which they are largely responsible. They begin to lose the approval of other influential people, whose sense of decency is outraged by such revelations. Many will be able to resist these guilt feelings for a long time when their power or pockets are involved. Meanwhile, however, the threat is growing. The people suffering the wrongs start to organize themselves. Individually they are weak, but together they can strike, refuse to pay rent, hold protest meetings and marches, or — if they become really desperate — riot, loot, destroy. Even together, they are no

Throughout the nineteenth century there were demonstrations, strikes and even riots about reform. In the late 1830s the focus was Chartism, demanding Parliamentary reforms such as secret ballots, payment of MPs and votes for all males. This was far more revolutionary than it sounds; the workers would have got real power in their struggle against the Poor Law and the mill-owners.

match for police or the military, unless guilt has sapped the will of authority to crush them. It is then that progress may be made — seldom the full demands of the oppressed, but enough to assuage the guilt and postpone the threat.

Of course this is a simplification. It does not apply universally. Nevertheless, most successful campaigns for a better deal need these two elements: the appeal to human decency and the threat of trouble. Improvement of conditions at work came partly through workers organizing themselves. They exerted their increasing power as union members and, eventually, as voters. Reformers and novelists meanwhile showed how real their grievances were.

Social reformers and novelists

They concentrated particularly on the sufferings of children. It was the most heart-rending evil, and remedying it indirectly improved working conditions for men alongside them. One of the leading campaigners was Lord Ashley, later Lord Shaftesbury, and his Ten Hours' Committee. Their first important victory was the 1833 Factory Act. It did not apply to all factories by any means — only those in the textile trades. All it did was to forbid more than eight hours' work per day from children under the age of thirteen, and more than twelve hours from those under eighteen. Much more important, however, it appointed four inspectors to investigate conditions and make sure that bad employers did not defy the Act. There had been other Acts in the past, but without people to enforce them, they had achieved practically nothing. Good employers who obeyed them had found themselves undercut by bad ones, who ignored the acts for the sake of getting more work out of their cheap labour.

It was the shocking information unearthed by these inspectors that was to compel further action in the future. Also, the inspectors had the right — it was

The Song of the Shirt

by Thomas Hood

With fingers weary and worn,
With eyelids heavy and red,
A Woman sat, in unwomanly rags,
Plying her needle and thread —
Stitch! stitch! stitch!
In poverty, hunger and dirt,
And still with a voice of dolorous pitch
She sang the 'Song of the Shirt!'

'Work — work — work
Till the brain begins to swim;
Work — work — work
Till the eyes are heavy and dim!
Seam, and gusset, and band,
Band, and gusset, and seam,
Till over the buttons I fall asleep,
And sew them on in a dream!

'O! Men with Sisters dear!
O! Men! with Mothers and wives
It is not linen you're wearing out,
But human creatures' lives!
Stitch — stitch — stitch,
In poverty, hunger and dirt,
Sewing at once, with a double thread,
A Shroud as well as a Shirt.

'But why do I talk of Death?
That Phantom of grisly bone,
I hardly fear his terrible shape,
It seems so like my own —
It seems so like my own,
Because of the fasts I keep,
Oh! God! that bread should be so dear,
And flesh and blood so cheap!

'Work — work — work!
My labour never flags;
And what are its wages? A bed of straw,
A crust of bread — and rags.
That shatter'd roof, — and this naked floor —
A table — a broken chair —
And a wall so blank, my shadow I thank
For sometimes falling there!

'Work — work — work,
In the dull December light,
And work — work — work,
When the weather is warm and bright —
While underneath the eaves
The brooding swallows cling
As if to show me their sunny backs
And twit me with the spring.

'Oh! but to breathe the breath
Of the cowslip and primrose sweet —
With the sky above my head,
And the grass beneath my feet,
For only one short hour
To feel as I used to feel,
Before I knew the woes of want
And the walk that costs a meal!

Seam, and gusset, and band,
Band, and gusset, and seam,
Work, work, work,
Like the Engine that works by Steam!
A mere machine of iron and wood
That toils for Mammon's sake —
Without a brain to ponder and craze
Or a heart to feel — and break!

With fingers weary and worn,
With eyelids heavy and red,
A Woman sat in unwomanly rags,
Plying her needle and thread —
Stitch! Stitch! Stitch!
In poverty, hunger and dirt,
And still with a voice of dolorous pitch,
Would that its tone could reach the Rich! —
She sang this 'Song of the Shirt!'



ANOTHER HORRIBLE! A MOST HORRIBLE MINE DISASTER!

*Nineteen Men & Boys Roasted to Death
in an Instant of Time,*

AND THREE OTHERS SERIOUSLY BURNT BY
MINE GAS, at ROUND'S GREEN, TUESDAY, NOV.
17, 1846.

Ministers of Religion,
Men and Women of Humanity,
Men of Philanthropy, and Men of Science;
Mine Owners, Bailiffs, Butties, Doggies, and Miners;
Coroners, Coroners' Juries, and Gentlemen of the Law;

*Can nothing be done to prevent or diminish these direful
Calamities?*

*May not the "Fire Damp" be driven out, as well
as blown out of Pits, and may it not even be made to
return to the Pit again, to light the men therewith while
working?*

*Is it not possible to have Gas Wags in Pits, as well
as Air Wags?*

*Should not a Premium of £500 or £1000 be offered
either by Government, Mine Owners, Working Colliers, the
Schools, or the Bazaar, for the discovery of an effectual
method of Coal Getting without the Loss of Life?*

SAMUEL COOK.

DUDLEY, NOV. 18, 1846.

Goodwin, Printer, Top of Broad-st., Dudley.

part of their job — to enter the private property of an employer and criticize what happened there. The inspectors made it clear that there were more important rights than the right to make profits.

What Shaftesbury and the Ten Hours' Committee were really after was a general limit of ten hours' work for everyone: men, women and children. They realized, however, that such a measure would be denounced as an invasion of liberty, and a threat to profits. Eminent economists and, less surprisingly, mill-owners seriously argued that it was only in the last two hours of the day that they made their profits.

Shaftesbury's campaign therefore concentrated on women and children — mills were only likely to run when there were female as well as male workers. In 1847, such an act was passed. It was a great victory,

Nineteenth-century women workers, pit-bank wenches, at Wednesbury.



but not quite as great as it seemed at first. Employers could get round it by bringing in women workers in relays, so that the mills could still be worked far into the night. This loophole was closed, at the cost of extending the working day to ten and a half hours, three years later.

In the same year, 1850, there was a series of terrible disasters in coal mines. Though an Inspector of Mines had been appointed under an earlier act, conditions were still appalling, and there were hardly any safety precautions. A new act laid down minimum standards of lighting and ventilation in mines. In general, it applied similar standards of safety to mining as were already in force in textile mills.

All this time trades other than textiles or the mines had no inspection or regulation. In 1863 the Children's Employment Commission, set up at Shaftesbury's insistence, published some extraordinary revelations including those at the beginning of this chapter. They recommended that: 'If Parliament should think fit to adopt our recommendations with regard to the above mentioned manufacturers (pottery, matches, cartridges, paper staining, bleaching and dyeing) the considerable number of upwards of seventeen thousand more children and young persons will be placed under the protection and be benefited by the privileges of the Factory Act.'

The commissioners also included a special 'Report on the violation of the law regulating the employment of climbing boys'. Among other things they recorded the evidence of Mr Thomas Clarke, chimney-sweep of Nottingham:

'I had myself formerly boys as young as five and a half years, but I did not like them; they were too weak. I was afraid they might go off. It is no light thing having a life lost in your service. They go off just as quietly as you might fall asleep in the chair, by the fire there. It is just as if you had two or three glasses of strong drink. . . .

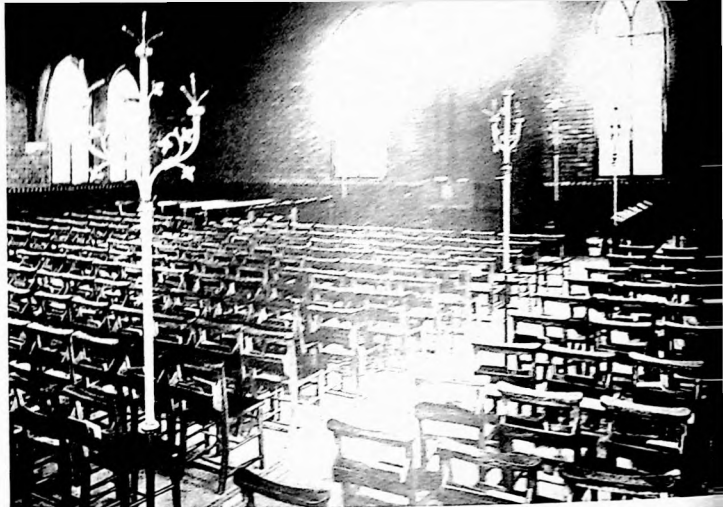


and Richard Stansfield,
chimney-sweep of Manchester:

In learning a child, you can't be soft with him, you must use violence. I shudder now when I think of it. I have gone to bed with my knee and elbow scabbed and raw, and the inside of my thighs all scarified; we slept five or six boys together in a kind of cellar with the soot bags over us, sticking in the wounds sometimes; that and some straw were all our bed and bedclothes; they were the same bags we had used in the day, wet or dry. I could read, and we used sometimes to subscribe for a candle to read by when we were in bed. I have seen the steam from our bodies so thick as to obscure the light so that I couldn't read at all.

In 1863 the novelist Charles Kingsley wrote *The Water Babies* about boy sweeps and Lord Shaftesbury seized the chance to get another act passed. It was welcomed as the Chimney Sweepers' Emancipation Day. The rejoicing was premature. Like so many laws about working conditions, the act was largely ignored. There were more reports; there were cases of boys dying in flues; the law was still ineffective. It was not until 1875, after a fourteen-year-old boy died sweeping a flue, that Shaftesbury got an effective act passed, with the safeguards to ensure that it was enforced.

Not all Victorian employers were ruthless exploiters of their work people. Some were extremely careful for their welfare, even to the extent of compulsory church services. Non-attendance could lead to dismissal. The chapel was actually in the factory Thomas Adams Ltd, Nottingham.



The campaigns of Samuel Plimsoll had extended protection to merchant seamen in 1876 and the Ship Hours Act at last provided some protection for ship workers. By the end of the century many of the worst abuses at work had been remedied for women and children, and hence in general for men. But this did not by any means leave a satisfactory picture.

There was still no compensation for injury at work:

Life was cheap in those days. It was by no means an uncommon thing to see the maimed and sometimes the dead being brought up from the dock bottom . . . Jim Platt, a machinist, had his back nearly broken by the fall of a loose plank from the workshop roof. The result — patched up in the hospital and then death after a year or two of lingering pain at work. But compensation was never thought of.

Conditions and wages

The increasing power of the trade unions began to ensure that compensation was looked into. The Factory Acts had forced employers to protect the health and safety of their workers. The next step was compensation, if these safeguards failed and resulted in death or injury. In 1897 the Workmen's Compensation Act was passed. It was extended and developed by later similar Acts.

It was for many years an unsatisfactory safeguard since the workman had to establish his claim, if necessary in a court of law, that the injury arose 'out of and in the course of the employment'. Employers were

often better equipped to fight claims than workmen or unions to press them. It was not until 1946 that the compensation for industrial injuries became part of the general social services provided by the State.

The struggle branched out into minimum wages as well as minimum conditions. In 1912, after the biggest strike Britain had ever seen, involving about a million miners, the Coal Mines (Minimum Wage) Act was passed. Twenty-two district boards were set up to fix legal minimum wages. Five years later the farm workers were similarly protected. The Corn Production Act included regulations for a minimum wage of at least 25s. a week. And the following year the Trade Board Act allowed for minimum wages to be fixed for any seriously underpaid trades.

Many vital improvements followed long struggles in particular industries, but were never made law. We are concerned here with those aspects of work that were felt to be so important that the state had to take a hand to see justice done. Events such as the great dock strike of 1889, which secured the 'docker's tanner' — a minimum wage of 6d. an hour — or the match girls' strike the previous year, were occasions when workers won reforms solely by industrial action in trade unions rather than politically in the House of Commons. They are outside this account.

Recent extensions

There are two further important landmarks, how-



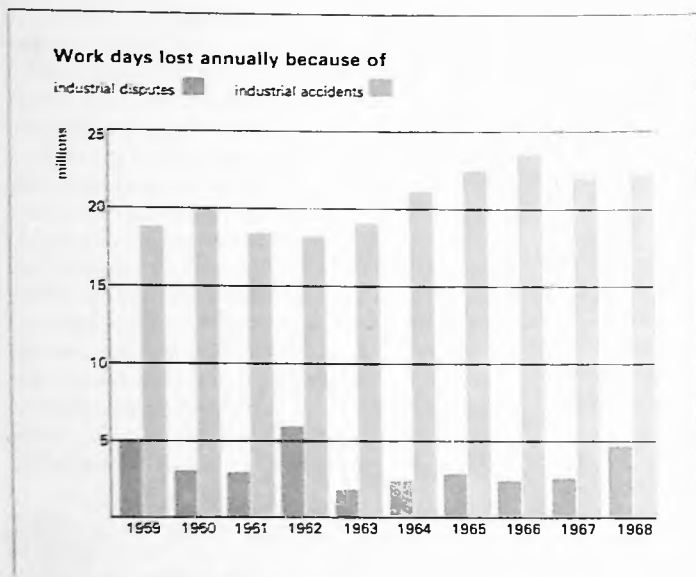
Members of the Match-makers Union who were successful in their strike in 1888 against the appalling conditions and low wages at Bryant & May, London.

Below: Nurses stage a sit-down protest against their pay and conditions in 1969.

ever. One is a fairly recent extension of welfare in an area of real importance — the Redundancy Payments Act of 1965. Under this, if a worker becomes redundant, he gets a week's pay for every year of service with his firm (younger workers slightly less, older slightly more). Thus the employer has a further responsibility to his employee — not only reasonable working conditions, not only compensation for injury connected with work, but now compensation if work is no longer available. We have come a long way since the days of 'bargains between equals' — when a worker had no rights and an employer no responsibilities.

The other new law was even more far reaching. The Race Relations Act of 1965 extended far beyond working conditions and was a historic piece of legislation. Once again, a vulnerable section of the community needed help to enforce its most basic





rights. Coloured people in Britain find great difficulty in getting jobs and accommodation. The Act set up a Race Relations Board and regional conciliation officers to deal with complaints. Their power has been increased since the 1968 Race Relations Act. The 1965 Act offered no way of making up for wrongs done, whereas now if a complaint cannot be settled by conciliation there are legal methods. For it is now unlawful to refuse someone work on grounds of race, colour or national origin.

We have come far, but not always as far as it might seem. There are still jobs not covered by the safeguards we have traced. A trawlerman may be maimed or injured — but neither he nor his widow has automatic compensation. The Workmen's Compensation Act does not apply to trawling. Many

workers are employed 'casually' for a few weeks or months at a time, especially in the building trade. Obviously they never stay in a firm long enough to qualify for redundancy payments. There are still trades that can affect the health of those working in them, such as asbestos.

There are still thousands of horrifying injuries at work every year. People fall or drop things. Tractors overturn. Machines are operated without guards, which is contrary to regulations, but it speeds up production and everyone winks at it. Safety precautions are often disregarded and, as a result, an average of seventy-five thousand workers are absent through injury every day. Although there are laws, they seldom apply to everyone; although there are safeguards, they are not always enforced.

Work

Men have always worked. Throughout most of human history, however, men either worked for themselves or took a share of what they earned. The system had its disadvantages. There was no protection against catastrophe, for example, and it was also important that women and children should help in the work as much as they could.

The Industrial Revolution changed this dramatically. In this new order of society most men worked for the benefit (and profit) of someone else, and took a fixed wage in return. The history of work since the Industrial Revolution has been a long attempt to find a balance of interest between worker and employer. It is a problem still largely unsolved.

1819 The Factory Act in this year banned the employment of children under the age of nine, and limited the working day of children between the ages of nine and sixteen to twelve hours. However, the Act only applied to cotton mills and, as there was no inspection, employers found it easy to evade both these and further regulations introduced in 1820, 1825 and 1830.

1833 Lord Shaftesbury's first Factory Act limited the working day of children between the ages of nine and thirteen to nine hours and, for those between the ages of thirteen and eighteen, to twelve hours. Four full-time inspectors were appointed, with full powers, so these regulations had 'teeth' in them. Although this Act was a great achievement and marked the beginning of an inspection system to see that the law was obeyed, it still only protected workers in cotton, woollen and flax mills.

1840 Shaftesbury's Chimney Sweeps Act banned the employment of children for chimney-sweeping. It was ignored by employers.

1842 Mines Act forbade the employment underground of women, or boys under the age of thirteen, and appointed an Inspector of Mines.

1847 Ten Hours Act limited the working day of women and children in textile mills to ten hours.

1850 The Factory Act in this year banned 'relays' of workers (a system organized by employers to get round the Ten Hours Act), but at the cost of increasing the working day to ten and a half hours. Mills were to be closed by 2 p.m. on Saturdays, which meant a sixty-hour week.

1850 Coal Mines Inspection Act introduced the inspection of safety conditions in mines.

1860-64 Factory Extension Acts in these years made previous factory regulations apply to other industries such as pottery and lace-making.

1864 The Factory Act in this year was the first of a series of acts on industrial problems such as lead-poisoning, ventilation and sanitation.

1867 Workshops Regulation Act made previous Factory Acts apply to all factories with over fifty workers.

1874 The Factory Act in this year reduced the working week to fifty-six and a half hours, that is, ten hours a day and six and a half hours on Saturdays.

1875 The Chimney Sweeps Act in this year finally prevented the use of boys to clean chimneys by making safeguards to see that the law was kept.

1876 Merchant Shipping Act was passed ordering a line to be painted round every ship to show how far it could safely be loaded. Before this, merchant seamen often had to sail in unseaworthy or overloaded ships whose owners knew they would get the insurance money if the ships sank. Not surprisingly, they were often referred to as 'coffin ships'.

1897 Workmen's Compensation Act made compensation for injury at work compulsory.

1911 Shops Act established the right of shopworkers to regular mealtimes and weekly half-holidays, but did not regulate working hours.

1912 Coalmines (Minimum Wage) Act set up district boards to fix minimum wages.

1917 Corn Production Act included a minimum wage for farm workers of 25s. a week.

1918 Trade Board Act laid down that minimum wages could be applied to any seriously underpaid trades.

1944 Wages Councils regulated wages in various industries.

1965 Redundancy Payments Act made payment compulsory for redundant workers, the amount depending on length of service.

1968 The Race Relations Act in this year forbade the refusal of employment on grounds of race or colour.

4 Seventy-five years of the workhouse

The Industrial Revolution largely created the problems of housing and work so far discussed. It also transformed an existing problem: helping the poor.

The responsibility of the parish

When people lived in smaller agricultural communities, the old, the sick and disabled were usually cared for by their families. Those in need got help from the rest of the parish. Family and parish responsibility were strong, and many of our present welfare institutions did not exist because they were unnecessary.

From Tudor times onwards, there had been a succession of Poor Laws which basically put the responsibility for helping those who were out of work, ill or orphaned on the parish where they had been born. If a man was out of his own parish, he could be deported back to it. Once there, he could be forced to work, if there was work, and given shelter in the workhouse or money or food in his own home.

Over the years this system worked with varying

success. In the late eighteenth century, however, bread was so dear in many areas that wages were not enough to live on, and a very large number of families were supported by Poor Relief, even though they were working. Not surprisingly, this was a heavy burden on the rates. Moreover, many people came into the towns leaving the parishes where they were born. It became impossible to send them back to their own parish if they needed Poor Relief, and very expensive to support them where they were. The system was collapsing and, in 1834, the New Poor Law was passed.

Commissioners investigated the existing arrangements to help the poor. They found a number of workhouses that were not well-run, where men who could have worked were allowed to idle. They were not typical, but the Commissioners gave the impression that they were. They praised a very different establishment, at Southwell, where conditions were 'as disagreeable as was consistent with health'. That was to be the model of the future.

With us the poor is commonly divided into three sorts, so that some are poor by impotency (helplessness), as the fatherless child, the aged, blind and lame, and the diseased person that is judged to be incurable: the second are poor by casualty (misfortune), as the wounded soldier, the decayed householder, and the sick person visited with grievous and painful diseases: the third consisteth of thirftless poor, as the rioter that hath consumed all, the vagabond that will abide nowhere but runneth up and down from place to place, and finally the rogue . . . if he happen to be convicted for a vagabond, either by inquest of office or the testimony of two honest and credible witnesses upon their oaths, he is then immediately adjudged to be grievously whipped and burned through the gristle of the right ear with an hot iron of the compass of an inch about, as a manifestation of his wicked life, and due punishment received for the same.

from *Description of England* by William Harrison (1587)



ELECTIONEERING LIES!

It has been industriously represented, with a view to injure me in the opinion of my Friends and Neighbours, the ELECTORS OF EAST-WORCESTERSHIRE, that I went to Kingswinford Workhouse and pulled the Plugs out of the Beer Barrels, to prevent the Poor from having the Beer. I solemnly declare this to be a *Scandalous Falsehood*, which Mr. WEBB, another Guardian of the Stourbridge Union, can bear witness to.

J. H. H. FOLEY.

DUDLEY, JULY 6, 1837

JOHN RANN, PRINTER, HALL-STREET, DUDLEY.

MORE TORY FALSEHOOD LIES!!

An Anonymous Hand-bill has just been issued reiterating the

BASE LIE,

RESPECTING THE BEER.

ELECTORS, Mr. FOLEY has already stated upon his word, that the Charge is **FALSE!** will you then believe the statement of an impudent anonymous TORY LIBELLER?

Why don't the *Tories Stick to Truth*, and remember their BASE statement about the *Poor Laws*. The truth is, the Tories **WELL KNOW** that they have no earthly chance but by

Trickery & Delusion.

Look at Oldswinford Hospital, and remember what Mr. FOLEY has done for the POOR.

Where's the Humbug?

July 7th, 1837.

NO CANT.

JOSEPH RANNING, PRINTER, HIGH STREET, STOURBRIDGE.

NO GO!

Mr. J. H. H. FOLEY has declared that he did not go to KINGSWINFORD WORKHOUSE and PULL THE PLUGS OUT OF THE BEER BARRELS to prevent the Poor from having the Beer.

HUMBUG!

If he did not Pull the Plugs out HIMSELF, HE ORDERED the Housekeeper to pull them out, and I solemnly declare he DID GO to the Workhouse and did

Prevent the Poor from having the Beer.

and that he would not leave the Workhouse until EVERY DROP WAS MADE-AWAY WITH. ASK Mr. and Mrs. JEFFCOATE IF THIS BE NOT TRUE, who were Governor and Matron of the Workhouse at the same time.

In the Barrel of Ale in the Celler I sat,
When FOLEY came there with his Horsehip and Hat;
With rage he was foaming, I can swear it is true,
He cried pull out the COCK—I cried Doodle Doo!

JACK SPIGOT.

*Kingswinford Workhouse,
J. 14 7th, 1837.*

THOMAS DANKS, PRINTER, HIGH STREET DUDLEY.

The administration of the Poor Law was always a matter of controversy and bitterness as in this lively election. The poor usually had more to complain of than the loss of their beer. The documents on the following four pages give an impression of the day-to-day treatment of the poor. Many local libraries, museums, or historical associations will have similar material of their own area.

Aug. 7	gave to 2 poor men by St. Johns Orders	2
9	2 pair of Shoes for Bedhouses Children	4
	half a pound of butter & 1 lb of sugar for old King	4½
	gave him more in his illness	1. 6
	Kings Shroud 6s. 8d. & 1 Shilling making	7. 8
	Paid the Clerks fees for burying King	2. 6
Oct. 3	Mary Mason cloth & winding for a Coat	6. 5
	a Pair of Coats for the Bedhouse	8. 9
	making 4 Shirts for Bedhouses Boy	1.



Borough
of To the Church-Wardens and Overseers of the Poor
Stafford. of the Parish of St. Mary in the Borough
of Patshull in the County of Stafford

And to the Church-Wardens and Overseers of the
Poor of the Parish of Aldridge in the County
of Stafford

WHEREAS Complaint hath been made by you the Church-Wardens
and Overseers of the Poor of the Parish of ~~St. Mary~~
Mary Ecclestone, unto us whose Hands and Seals are hereunto
set, That your Majesty's Justices of the Peace (one being of the Quorum, & the
other of STAFFORD aforesaid, that Mary Ecclestone wife
of Job Ecclestone (now a Soldier in the South
Regiment of Foot &

lately intruded herself into your said Parish, & that Mary
there to inhabit as a Pariah, contrary to the Laws relating to
the Settlement of the Poor, and so likely to become Chargeable to the said
Parish of St. Mary

We upon Examination thereof, and of the said Job Ecclestone
up a Oath, touching the said Settlement, do adjudge the Premises to be true,
and that the said Place of the Legal Settlement of the said Mary Ecclestone
Mary Ecclestone is in the said Parish of Aldridge
in the said County of Stafford

THESE are therefore in his Majesty's Name, to Order and Require you
the said Church-Wardens and Overseers of the Poor of the Parish of ~~St. Mary~~
St. Mary aforesaid, That you or some of you do
forthwith remove and convey the said Mary Ecclestone
from your said Parish, and
to the said Parish of Aldridge
and do deliver to the Church-Wardens and Overseers of the Poor
there, or some of them, together with this our Warrant or Order, or a
true Copy thereof, whereby they are likewise Required in his Majesty's Name,
and by Virtue of the Statutes in that behalf made, forthwith to receive the said
Mary Ecclestone into their said
Parish, and provide for her as their own Pariah
until they shall be discharged or otherwise by due Course of Law.
Given under our Hands and Seals the 14th day of May in the
10th year of the Reign of our said Majesty Queen Anne
the 10th day of May in the 10th year of our said Majesty Queen Anne
and in the 10th year of our Lord One Thousand Seven Hundred
and eighty one

In 1601 the Poor Relief Act made
each parish responsible for helping its
own poor.

The Justices of the Peace appointed
Overseers of the Poor to collect rates
(an unpopular job) and keep an
account of how they spent the money
on the poor of that parish.

The system remained much the
same for over two hundred years and
these accounts (above) of the
Overseers at Patshull in Staffordshire
show how some of the money was
spent in 1744.

If money could be saved by proving
that a particular pauper was some
other parish's responsibility he or
she was promptly sent there. The
order to remove Mary Ecclestone from
the parish of St Mary to the parish of
Aldridge was because she 'had a
settlement' in the latter. Her husband
Job Ecclestone, now in the army,
had lived there. You might have a
settlement where you were born, or
where you occupied property valued
£10 a year or where you were
apprenticed.

COUNTY OF
Stafford,
TO WIT.

WHEREAS one of the Overseers
of the Poor of the Parish of *St. Martin* in the County
of Stafford, hath on this *twenty fifth* day of *July* in the
Year of the Reign of King William the Fourth, at the Shire Hall,
in Stafford, in the said County, brought before us,

two of the Justices
assigned to keep the Peace, in and for the said County of Stafford, and also
to hear and determine divers Felonies, Trespasses, and other Misdemeanors,
in the said County committed, *Ann Yates* a poor
Child of the Age of *11* Years, and upwards, belonging to and having
a Settlement in the said Parish of *St. Martin* in the said
County, and whose Parents *are dead*

is poor and not able to maintain such Child: and
the said *John Walton* as such Overseer of the Poor of
the said Parish of *St. Martin* hath proposed to us, the
said Justices, to bind such Child to be an Apprentice to one *John Yates*
of the Parish of *St. Martin*

in the County of Stafford, and residing within the distance of Forty Miles
from the Parish or Place to which the said Child belongs, and, as an
Apprentice with *Ann* the said *John Yates* shall come
to dwell and serve until the said *Ann Yates*
to the Age of Twenty-one Years, *the term of the apprenticeship*
shall be *three years* according to the Statutes in such
case made and provided. And whereas we, the said Justices, having now
been enquired into the propriety of Binding such Child Apprentice to the
said *John Yates* being a person to whom it hath
been so proposed by such Overseer to bind such Child as aforesaid: And
whereas we, the said Justices, having now been enquired into the

And we have now here particularly enquired of the said *John Walton*
and otherwise, as to the Distance of the
Residence and Place of Business of the said *John Yates*
the Person to whom it hath been so proposed to place such Child, and the
means of Communication therewith: And whereas also we, the said Justices,
have also now here inquired into the Circumstances and Character of the said
John Yates and on such Examination and
Inquiry, We, the said Justices, think it proper that such Child should be
bound Apprentice to the said *John Yates*. Now, therefore,
We, the said Justices, do declare, that the said *John Yates*
is a fit Person to whom the said Child may be properly bound as Apprentice
as aforesaid. And we do therefore hereby Order and Direct that the said
John Walton the Overseer aforesaid, of the Parish
of *St. Martin* aforesaid, being the Place to which such Child doth
belong, shall be and is at liberty to bind such Child Apprentice accordingly.

Given under our Hands and Seals this *twenty fifth* day
of *July* in the Year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred
and thirty *five*

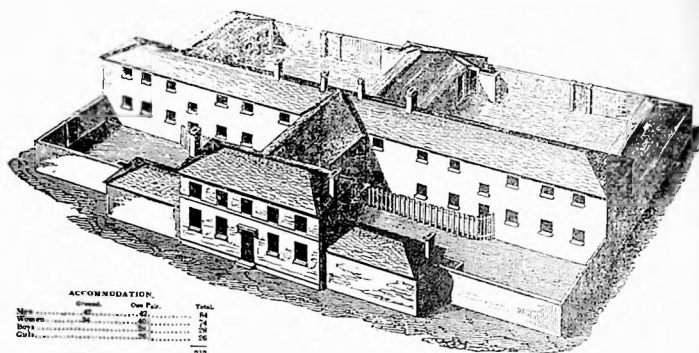
The Overseers also had the job of finding such apprenticeships for orphans in their care. Some took great care that the employer was a suitable person. But once he was an apprentice no one, certainly not an unpaid overseer, was responsible for the conditions he worked in.

From 1795 until the New Poor Law help for the poor was based on the price of bread according to the scale shown below. This has some resemblance both to the modern 'cost-of-living index' which influences many wage settlements and to our system of family allowances. But though in some respects very enlightened, the Speenhamland system was a failure. It sent the rates soaring and it kept wages down, since in hard times they were automatically made up by Poor Relief.

" This shows, at one view, what should be the Weekly Income of the Indifferent Poor, as settled by the Magistrates for the county of Berks, at a Meeting held at Speenhamland, May the 6th, 1795.		Income should be for a Man.	For a Single Woman.	For a Man and his Wife.	With One Child.	With Two Children.	With Three Children.	With Four Children.	With Five Children.	With Six Children.	With Seven Children.
	s. d.	s. d.	s. d.	s. d.	s. d.	s. d.	s. d.	s. d.	s. d.	s. d.	s. d.
When the gallon loaf is . . . 1 0	3 0	2 0	4 6	6 0	7 6	9 0	10 6	12 0	13 6	15 0	
When " " . . . 1 1	3 3	2 1	4 10	6 5	8 0	9 7	11 2	12 9	14 4	15 11	
When " " . . . 1 2	3 6	2 2	5 2	6 10	8 6	10 2	11 10	13 6	15 2	16 10	
When " " . . . 1 3	3 9	2 3	5 6	7 3	9 0	10 9	12 6	14 3	16 0	17 9	
When " " . . . 1 4	4 0	2 4	5 10	7 8	9 6	11 4	13 2	15 0	16 10	18 8	
When " " . . . 1 5	4 0	2 5	5 11	7 10	9 9	11 8	13 7	15 6	17 5	19 4	
When " " . . . 1 6	4 3	2 6	6 3	8 3	10 3	12 3	14 3	16 3	18 3	20 3	
When " " . . . 1 7	4 3	2 7	6 4	8 5	11 6	12 7	14 8	16 9	18 10	20 11	
When " " . . . 1 8	4 6	2 8	6 8	8 10	11 0	13 2	15 4	17 6	19 8	21 10	
When " " . . . 1 9	4 6	2 9	6 9	9 0	11 3	13 6	15 9	18 0	20 3	22 6	
When " " . . . 1 10	4 9	2 10	7 1	9 5	11 9	14 1	16 5	18 9	21 1	23 5	

The Poor Law Commissioners had plans drawn up to show the Poor Law Guardians in each area the type of workhouse they should build for their union of parishes (right).

The spread of these workhouses — 'Bastilles' as the poor soon came to call them — was bitterly and sometimes violently resisted, particularly in the North. The Rev. Joseph Stephens, a Methodist, addressed mass meetings with the advice 'If the musket and the pistol, the sword and the pike are of no avail, let the woman take the scissors, the child the pin or the needle. If all fails, the firebrand — ay, the firebrand, the firebrand, I repeat!'



One workhouse catered for all the poor in the neighbourhood regardless of why they were poor. So the harsh regime (below) intended to make able-bodied people keep clear of the workhouse tended on the whole to apply to the old and sick as well.

DIETARY for able-bodied Men and Women.

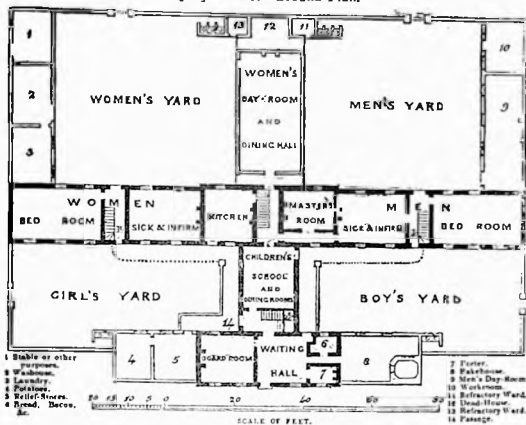
		BREAKFAST.		DINNER.				SUPPER.			OLD PEOPLE of 60 Years of Age and upwards, may be allowed 1oz. of Tea, 7oz. of Sugar, and 5oz. of Butter per Week, in lieu of Gruel for Breakfast, if deemed expedient to make this change. CHILDREN under Nine Years of Age to be allowed Bread and Milk for their Breakfast and Supper, or Gruel when Milk cannot be obtained, also such proportions of the Dinner Diet as may be requisite for their respective ages. CHILDREN above Nine Years of Age to be allowed the same quantities as Women. SICK to be Dieted as directed by the Medical Officer.
		Bread.	Gruel.	Cooked Meat with Vegetables.*	Lobscouse.	Soup with Vegetables.*	Suet Pudding.	Bread.	Cheese.	Broth Thickened.	
		oz.	Pints.	oz.	Pints.	Pints.	oz.	oz.	oz.	Pints.	
		oz.	Pints.	oz.	Pints.	Pints.	oz.	oz.	oz.	Pints.	
Sunday...	Men...	7	1½	6	—	—	—	5	—	1½	CHILDREN under Nine Years of Age to be allowed Bread and Milk for their Breakfast and Supper, or Gruel when Milk cannot be obtained, also such proportions of the Dinner Diet as may be requisite for their respective ages. CHILDREN above Nine Years of Age to be allowed the same quantities as Women. SICK to be Dieted as directed by the Medical Officer.
	Women...	6	1½	5	—	—	—	4	—	1½	
Monday...	Men...	7	1½	—	—	1½	—	6	2	—	
	Women...	6	1½	—	—	1½	—	5	2	—	
Tuesday...	Men...	7	1½	—	—	—	14	6	2	—	
	Women...	6	1½	—	—	—	12	5	2	—	
Wednesday...	Men...	7	1½	6	—	—	—	5	—	1½	
	Women...	6	1½	5	—	—	—	4	—	1½	
Thursday...	Men...	7	1½	—	—	1½	—	6	2	—	
	Women...	6	1½	—	—	1½	—	5	2	—	
Friday...	Men...	7	1½	—	2	—	—	6	2	—	
	Women...	6	1½	—	2	—	—	5	2	—	
Saturday...	Men...	7	1½	—	—	—	14	6	2	—	
	Women...	6	1½	—	—	—	12	5	2	—	

* "SOUP" made in the proportion of One Pound of Beef or Mutton to One Gallon of Water, with Vegetables.

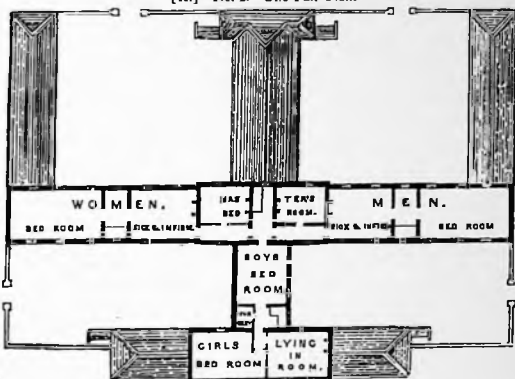
* "PEAN SOUP" made in the proportion of One Pound of Beef or Mutton and One Pint of Peas to One Gallon of Water.

* The VEGETABLES are EXTRA, and not included in the above specified.

[K.] No. 1. Ground Plan.



[K.] No. 2. One Pair Plan.



These are some of the cases put before the Guardians of the Leek Union in the 1830s. What decisions do you think the Guardians came to? Answers on page 93.

- A Mellor John aged 48 Short of support able bodied
sells pots earns 4/ per week makes his
wife aged 40 earns nothing has 4 children
for sale aged 15 earns 4/ per week 6th boy
of very ill earns nothing Ann aged 6 Jane
aged 1 have been informed he might support
his family if he was not so idle
- B Hulme Samuel aged 67 Brown Lodge I very off for
bedding he has nothing but a bit of
straw in a corner of the house to lie
down upon & he begs you will allow
him a blanket or two now receives 1/6
& 8 lbs of bread
- C Phillips John Age 26 reaps Mow is a shoe maker
Hannah his Wife Age 26 is at this time very ill and
receiving Medical relief he applies for a little relief
a few weeks till she is better has 4 children Conch
Age 6 Mary Age 5 Ann Age 4 Sarah Age 2
- D Salt John Age 70 Blkstone he applies for a Coat
Waistcoat and a pair of Breeches he is a Labourer but
his earnings are nothing as he is unable to work through
old age Ann his Wife Age 45 has 3 children Caroline Age
9 Catherine Age 6 Philip Age 4 now receive 12 lbs bread
& 3/- per week

Charles Dickens was a journalist as well as a novelist. He recounts what he found one November in Whitechapel:

Crouched against the wall of the Workhouse, in the dark street, on the muddy pavement-stones, with the rain raining upon them, were five bundles of rags. They were motionless, and had no resemblance to the human form. Five great beehives, covered with rags — five dead bodies taken out of graves, tied neck and heels, and covered with rags — would have looked like those five bundles upon which the rain rained down in the public street.

'What is this!' said my companion. 'What *is* this!'

'Some miserable people shut out of the Casual Ward, I think,' said I.

We had stopped before the five ragged mounds, and were quite rooted to the spot by their horrible appearance. Five awful Sphinxes by the wayside, crying to every passer-by. 'Stop and guess! What is to be the end of a state of society that leaves us here!'

Dickens knocked at the Workhouse door and was told by the master that he knew nothing about the people outside.

'The place is full. The place is always full — every night. I must give the preference to women with children, mustn't I?'

We went to the ragged bundle nearest to the workhouse-door, and I touched it. No movement replying, I gently shook it. The rags began to be slowly stirred within, and by little and little a head was unshrouded. The head of a young woman of three or four and twenty, as I should judge, gaunt with want, and foul with dirt, but not naturally ugly.

'Tell us,' said I, stooping down. 'Why are you lying here?'

'Because I can't get into the workhouse.'

'She spoke in a faint dull way, and had no curiosity or interest left. She looked dreamily at the black sky and the falling rain, but never looked at me or my companion.

'Were you here last night?'

'Yes. All last night. And the night afore too.'

'Do you know any of these others?'

'I know her next but one. She was here last night and she told me she come out of Essex. I don't know no more of her.'

'You were here all last night, but you have not been here all day?'

'No. Not all day.'

'Where have you been all day?'

'About the streets.'

'What have you had to eat?'

'Nothing.'

'Come!' said I, 'Think a little. You are tired and have been asleep, and don't quite consider what you are saying to us. You have had something to eat today. Come! Think of it!'

'No I haven't. Nothing but such bits as I could pick up about the market. Why, look at me!' She bared her neck, and I covered it up again.

'If you had a shilling to get some supper and a lodging, should you know where to get it?'

'Yes. I could do that.'

'For God's sake get it then!'

I put the money into her hand, and she feebly rose up and went away. She never thanked me, never looked at me — melted away into the miserable night, in the strangest manner I ever saw. I have seen many strange things, but not one that has left a deeper impression on my memory than the dull impassive way in which that worn-out heap of misery took that piece of money, and was lost.

from Charles Dickens, *A Nightly Scene in London*



Worse than life outside

Boards of Guardians were to be elected for a group of parishes to administer poor relief according to three principles.

1. No help was to be given to able-bodied people in their own homes — only in a workhouse.
2. This help was to be 'less eligible' (that is, less attractive) than the most unpleasant means of earning a living outside the workhouse.
3. Man and wife were to be separated — to prevent child-bearing.

The harshness of the second point is clearer if it is realized how dreadful life could be for a working man in the 1830s and 1840s; workhouse life was to be worse.

This assumed, of course, that paupers were able-bodied idlers who must be forced back to work. Poverty arose 'from fraud, indolence and idleness'. This was simply untrue for the most part, but no one bothered to find out. Most of the poor, as they always had been and still are, were widows, children, old people, the sick and disabled. In theory, different categories of poor people were to be separated into different buildings and treated differently. In practice, the unions of parishes who administered the law usually built a single workhouse for all paupers and attempted some sort of segregation inside it.

Separation of the sexes was to be 'entire and absolute', a ruling that produced deep bitterness. The distress of being poor and hungry was enough in itself. To it was added the shame of going to the workhouse

at all. Then to separate the husband from his wife and children was a piece of inhumanity that may seem incredible. Edwin Chadwick, who administered the law, however, found it quite logical. Malthus had already warned of the danger of rising population. Paupers must not be allowed to breed more paupers.

Nevertheless in a single building it was not possible to achieve any real separation. Husband and wife might be prevented from sleeping together at night, but by day the sick and the feeble-minded mingled freely with young children and expectant mothers. There was a single dining hall and chapel for all categories of inmate and no attempt was made to cope with their different needs. The scenes of horror this produced were vividly described from actual observation by Charles Dickens in *A Walk in a Workhouse*:

Aged people were there, in every variety. Mumbling, blear-eyed, spectacled, stupid, deaf, lame; vacantly winking in the gleams of sun that now and then crept in through the open doors, from the paved yard; shading their listening ears, or blinking eyes, with their withered hands; poring over their books, leering at nothing, going to sleep, crouching and drooping in corners. There were weird old women, all skeleton within, all bonnet and cloak without, continually wiping their eyes with dirty dusters of pocket-handkerchiefs; and there were ugly old crones, both male and female, with a ghastly kind of contentment upon them which was not at all comforting to see.

Further on he came across a nurse (herself a pauper) in charge of one of the wards:

On being spoken to about the patients whom she had in charge, she turned round, with her shabby gown half on, half off, and fell a-crying with all her might. Not for show, not querulously, not in any mawkish sentiment, but in the deep grief and affliction of her heart, turning away her dishevelled head; sobbing most bitterly, wringing her hands, and letting fall abundance of great tears, that choked her

utterance. What was the matter with the nurse of the itch-ward? Oh, 'the dropped child' was dead! Oh, the child that was found in the street, and she had brought up ever since, had died an hour ago, and see where the little creature lay, beneath this cloth! The dear, the pretty dear!

The dropped child seemed too small and poor a thing for Death to be in earnest with, but Death had taken it; and already its diminutive form was neatly washed, composed, and stretched as if in sleep upon a box.

There was a girl suffering from epileptic fits, quite normal except when seized by an attack, who had been put with 'six or eight noisy madwomen':

... she pathetically complained that the daily association and the nightly noise made her worse, and was driving her mad — which was perfectly evident. The case was noted for inquiry and redress, but she said she had already been there for some weeks.

And Dickens's overall impression:

Groves of babies in arms; groves of mothers and other sick women in bed; groves of lunatics; jungles of men in stone-paved downstairs day-rooms, waiting for their dinners; longer and longer groves of old people, in upstairs Infirmary wards, wearing out life, God knows how — this was the scenery through which the walk lay, for two hours.

An old man asks for a little more bread; another would like to get more fresh air as 'the regular leave for going out comes round so seldom'. Some crippled boys and youths are locked up in a yard. An idiot with an enlarged head shuffles along the pavement. A badly burnt child lies quietly in another room, with something wistful and appealing in his tiny face, as if 'he pleaded, on behalf of the helpless and the aged poor, for a little more liberty — and a little more bread'.

Pauper children

Dickens knew, however, that terrible as this workhouse was, things could be far worse. The children

there appeared to be well-treated. This was certainly not always so. Pauper boys could be 'farmed out' as apprentices to employers who treated them abominably. In a particularly bad case in Tooting, cholera broke out in an establishment run by a Mr Drouet. He had taken no health precautions to prevent infection spreading. He had far more pauper children than the authorities allowed (he was paid 4s. 6d. a week for each of them, apart from the work he got out of them) and they were sleeping four to a bed. Their food was so bad that 'they climb secretly over palings, and pick out scraps of sustenance from the tubs of hogmash'. Their clothing was rags and their bed-clothes almost non-existent. 'Their rooms are cold, damp, dirty and rotten.'

The boys under Mr Drouet's fostering protection are habitually knocked down, beaten and brutally used. They are put on short diets if they complain. They are very lean and emaciated, with wasted limbs, itch and wounds from being kicked and flogged.

These children were under the protection of the Poor Law Guardians, who had inspected Mr Drouet:

'We were there at the time of dinner being supplied, and in our opinion the meat provided was good, but the potatoes were bad. We visited the schoolrooms, dormitories and workshops. Everything appeared clean and comfortable, yet we are of opinion that the new sleeping rooms for infants on the ground floor have a very unhealthy smell. The girls belonging to the union looked very well. The boys appeared sickly, which induced us to question them as to whether they had any cause of complaint as to supply of food or otherwise. About forty of them held up their hands to intimate their dissatisfaction, upon which Mr Drouet's conduct became violent. He called the boys liars, described some that had held up their hands as the worst boys in the school, and said that if he had done them justice, he would have followed out the suggestion of Mr James, and well thrashed them.

One of the party also wrote his own account:

I cut open about one hundred potatoes at different tables, none of them were fit to eat. They were black and diseased. I told Mr Drouet the potatoes were very bad. He replied that they cost him £7 a ton. The children had no other vegetables. I told Mr Drouet I should give them other food. He made no reply. I also told Mr Drouet I thought the newly erected rooms smelt unhealthy. Mr Mayes said it was a pity when he was building he had not made the rooms lighter; when Mr Drouet said he would have enough to do if he paid attention to everybody.

One of the boys whom I questioned told me they had not bread enough either for breakfast or supper; and, on comparing their dietary with that in the workhouse, I think such is the case. In consequence of the confusion, we left Mr Drouet's without signing the visitors' book. I did not make any motion in the Board of Guardians for the removal of the children.

He did not question whether the children should stay. Cholera, not the Guardians, ensured the removal of the children — for good.

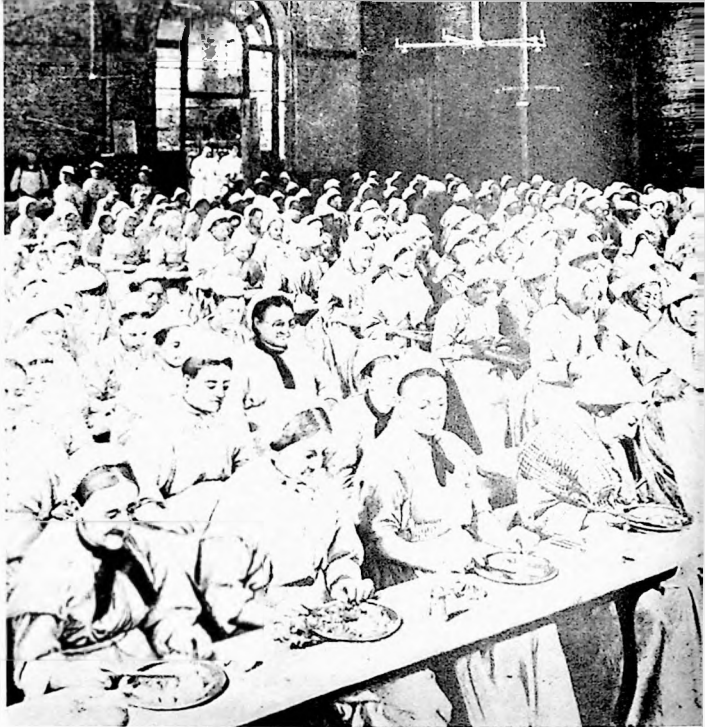
It is difficult to know how widespread such conditions were. It is clear that they were readily tolerated by those who should have taken action to improve them. The 'barrack schools' run by the workhouse themselves were often no better. Children went to them at three or four years old, but they had usually no equipment and low standards of cleanliness. Diseases such as ophthalmia — a painful eye condition often leading to blindness — were widespread. There were seldom proper teachers, simply other paupers who were often old, ill or feeble-minded. Workhouse conditions were frequently exposed by newspapers:

The poor-law commissioners have determined upon a rigid investigation being made into all the circumstances connected with the shocking flagellations of the little girls who preferred their complaints before the Rochester bench of magistrates about a fortnight ago. Since that period a num-

Dinnertime in St Pancras Workhouse in 1900. As in Dickens's day the sexes were still separated. Charles Chaplin had to go into the Lambeth Workhouse as a boy of six in 1895 and described in *My Autobiography* what it was like:

'I didn't know what was happening until we actually entered the workhouse gate. Then the forlorn bewilderment of it struck me; for there we were made to separate. Mother going in one direction to the women's ward and we in another to the children's.

How well I remember the poignant sadness of that first visiting day: the shock of seeing Mother enter the visiting-room garbed in workhouse clothes. How forlorn and embarrassed she looked! In one week she had aged and grown thin, but her face lit up when she saw us. Sydney and I began to weep which made Mother weep, and large tears began to run down her cheeks.'



ber of other and equally revolting charges have transpired, in some instances the objects of the master's displeasure having scarcely turned two years old having been stripped and brutally beaten upon their naked persons.

Roberts further stated that a female named Hill was sent to the black hole, without fire or food, but bread and water, for twenty-four hours, for washing her husband's trowsers, and at the end of that time she was further sent for twenty-four hours more because she refused to beg the master's pardon.

Complaints often stressed the lack of adequate food and clothing:

Men who were in the workhouse employed in crushing bones had been in the habit of selecting and eating from the heap such as had gristle or marrow in them.

The flannel petticoats worn by the miserable female children, in the severest weather of this winter, could be — as was publicly stated in another metropolitan union a few days ago — 'read through'.

Humiliation

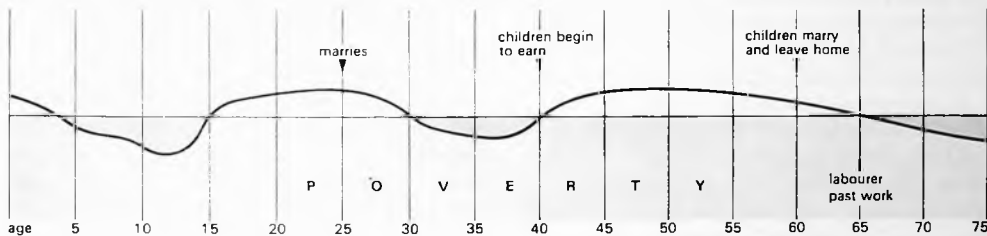
The real point about the workhouse system, though, was not these notorious scandals. There were certainly workhouses where food was more plentiful and conditions cleaner than anywhere else in the neighbourhood. But they were still shunned, as they were *intended* to be. The whole point of 'less eligibility' was that it should be unpleasant and degrading to take poor relief.

Becoming a pauper did not just mean being poor. It was an actual legal status and, like a black person in South Africa today, paupers were denied many basic human rights. A pauper and his family had to live in the workhouse, where this was possible, and suffer its discomfort and humiliation. If he had the vote, he lost it. His children had to go to pauper schools and use pauper infirmaries because it was not just a man who became a pauper — if he did, his whole family did.

The essential thing was humiliation. The poor

The life of a labourer is marked by five alternating periods of want and comparative plenty. During early childhood, unless his father is a skilled worker, he probably will be in poverty; this will last until he, or some of his brothers and sisters, begin to earn money and thus augment their father's wage sufficiently to raise the family above the poverty line. Then follows the period during which he is earning money and living under the parents' roof; for some portion of this period he will be earning more money than is required for lodging, food and clothes. This is his chance to save money . . . this period of pros-

This 'cycle of poverty' still applies to many families today.



perity may continue after marriage until he has two or three children, when poverty will again overtake him. This period of poverty will last perhaps for ten years, i.e. until the first child is fourteen and begins to earn wages; but if there are more than three children it may last longer. While the children are earning, and before they leave the home to marry, the man enjoys another period of prosperity—possibly however only to sink back again into poverty when his children have married and left him, and he himself is too old to work.

from *Poverty* by Seebohm Rowntree (1900)

had to recognize their inferior status and moral failure. They had to be grateful for any small mercies shown them. When *Oliver Twist* dared to ask for more to eat in the workhouse, his crime was not the size of his appetite, it was to think that he, a pauper, had any rights.

Poor relief was often given to old or sick people in their own homes. Workhouses were too small for all those in need and it was cheaper to give them money. But it was given (or refused) in the workhouse spirit.

Private charity did some good, but tended to have an air of condescension about it. Ladies did good works and expected no reward except gratitude from the 'deserving poor'. The 'undeserving' were not to be helped.

Sickness and old age

Gradually, however, towards the end of the century there was the beginning of a real understanding of poverty. Novelists and pamphleteers, journalists

and MPs had all helped. Now came the statisticians. In 1900, Seebohm Rowntree published a study of poverty in York. By 1903 Charles Booth had published the last volumes of *London Life and Labour*, a monumental description of slums, work, health and poverty. It studied people's trades; the districts they lived in; the size and state of their homes; their hours of work; their pay; the extent of unemployment or irregular employment. It is difficult nowadays, when most of this information is readily available in any reference library, to realize what an extraordinary achievement this work was, or how startling its findings were. It showed that the vast mass of poverty was due either to inadequate wages, unemployment, old age or sickness. A review of Booth's book in the *Observer* shows how unexpected this information was:

The pauperism which is most probable is not, as we have all been taught, due to drunkenness, vice and laziness, but to other causes, which should excite compassion rather than contempt.

Sickness and old age — these, and not drunkenness, laziness and vice are, according to Mr Booth's unimpeachable figures, the chief cause of poverty in London. Indeed, old age alone is responsible for about one-third of the pauperism in England and Wales.

Clearly the existing Poor Law was quite the wrong way of helping the old. Old people were poor because they had stopped earning. When they had been working their wages had been too low to save enough for their old age. The whole philosophy of the Poor Law was to deter people from living off the parish when they ought to be working. But you couldn't deter people from getting old or ill.

There had, of course, been changes in the Poor Law by this time — in 1871 the Poor Law Board became the Local Government Board with wider responsibilities — but no change in the essential philosophy. It was not until 1905 that there was a thorough investigation of how the Poor Law operated, who it helped and whether the job was being done properly.

The Royal Commission on the Poor Law finally reported in 1909. It found that many things were not very different from what Dickens had described years earlier.

We have seen feeble-minded boys growing up in the Workhouse year after year untaught and untrained, alternately neglected and tormented by the other inmates, because it had not occurred to the Board of Guardians to send them to (and to pay for them at) a suitable institution. We have ourselves seen . . . idiots who are physically offensive or mischievous, or so noisy as to create a disturbance by day and by night with their howls, living in the ordinary wards . . . We have seen imbeciles annoying the sane, and the sane tormenting the imbeciles. We have seen half-witted women nursing the sick, feeble-minded women in charge of the babies, and imbecile old men put to look after the boys out of school hours. We have seen expectant

mothers, who have come in for their confinements, by day and by night working, eating and sleeping in close companionship with idiots and imbeciles of revolting habits and hideous appearance.

It showed that the poor included many children, sick people and old people. No one could now believe that the workhouses were full of drunken idlers who couldn't be bothered to work.

Welfare for all?

The Royal Commission produced two reports. Both were sympathetic to the poor. They recommended that the whole idea of *detering* people from poverty should be abandoned; the Poor Law must recognize its causes and cure them. Old-age pensions (which had been introduced while the Commission was still sitting) were commended; free hospital treatment should be extended; young children with poverty-stricken or neglectful parents should be properly cared for in residential schools or with foster-parents. For able-bodied men the cause of their poverty, unemployment, should be tackled, not just the effect of their poverty. The Majority Report wanted to work mainly through voluntary bodies backed up by a Public Assistance Division of the local authority. There would still be separate treatment for paupers from the rest of the population.

The Minority Report was much more revolutionary. It pointed out that over the years, local authorities had gradually been providing, for everyone, very similar services to those provided by the Poor Law for paupers. This was particularly true of schools and hospitals. The difference, of course, was that no one was ashamed to use them. Why continue this duplication? Why not 'complete the process of breaking up the Poor Law' and provide a complete public health service, education and other services for everyone, whether they were poor or not?

Part two

The people featured here are not quite as various as those on p. 11. Politicians and civil servants predominate — welfare questions had by now become a matter of politics rather than individual charity.



Aneurin Bevan (1897–1960)
One of thirteen children of a Welsh miner. Worked in the pit on leaving school at thirteen and became an active trade unionist. Elected as a Labour MP in 1929, the same year as Jennie Lee whom he later married. A brilliant orator who as Minister of Health 1945–51 created the National Health Service.



William Beveridge (1879–1963)
His lifetime interest in social problems started when he worked at Toynbee Hall in the East End after leaving Oxford. He helped prepare Lloyd George's National Insurance Act, ran the first Labour Exchanges and wrote *The Beveridge Report*, blueprint for the post-war Welfare State.



Richard Crossman (b. 1907)
Labour politician and writer who introduced many important reforms, including 'fair rents', new incentives to improve areas of bad housing, and improvements in Social Security benefits and the Health Service. Particularly emphasized the plight of the mentally handicapped as one of the great unsolved problems of the Welfare State.



John Maynard Keynes (1883–1946) The economist who revolutionized the whole outlook on what could be done about unemployment. Paying benefits, however generously, was not tackling the heart of the problem: Governments could actually *prevent* unemployment if they had the right policies.



David Lloyd George (1863–1945). A radical reformer as President of the Board of Trade and Chancellor of the Exchequer. As Prime Minister leader in the First World War. The Merchant Shipping Act laid down living conditions for seamen and as Chancellor he introduced old-age pensions and National Insurance, the foundation stones of the Welfare State.



George Orwell (1903–1950)
Author of *The Road to Wigan Pier*, *Down and Out in Paris and London* and many novels. He did for the thirties what Dickens did for Victorian times. 'He brought home to the sleeping imagination the real lives of suffering men and women.'



Richard Titmuss (b. 1907)
Professor of Social Administration at the London School of Economics. Little known to the general public but one of the great influences on current attitudes to the Welfare State. Research by him and other academics has demolished many comfortable assumptions that incomes are now much more equal and poverty disappearing.



Sidney Webb (1859–1947)
With his wife Beatrice (1858–1953) one of the great thinkers about social reform for over fifty years. Beatrice was a member of the Commission on the Poor Law and with Sidney wrote the famous Minority Report challenging the whole basis of the Poor Law. They founded the *New Statesman*.

5 From Poor Law to Welfare State

The importance of the Royal Commission's two reports cannot be exaggerated. Their similarities showed how far people had moved from Victorian complacency about poverty. Their differences highlighted fundamentally different solutions for it. The question was no longer how to punish paupers, but how to prevent poverty. The government must play a role in this; the dispute was how.

Did society need really far-reaching changes, or should the government disrupt things as little as possible? Should help for the poor be a separate service, or part of a welfare system for everyone? Should it be mainly the responsibility of voluntary organizations, or should the state play the major part? Is this help a right everyone has, or a privilege that must be earned?

This debate about the aims and methods of welfare has gone on ever since.

Old-Age Pensions

The opening skirmishes in the argument had already taken place just before these reports during the debates on the introduction of old-age pensions. Charles Booth argued from his research that the simplest, most humane and most effective remedy for poverty in old age was to give everyone over the age of sixty-five a pension from the State of 5s. a week. No stigma of being 'on the parish', no means test, no conditions except age.

The idea was too revolutionary to be accepted at once. Even politicians like Joseph Chamberlain, who had crusaded for better conditions for 'the lower orders', evoked the horrors of helping spongers:

I make a great distinction between the working man, the honest, the industrious, the steady workman who has done his best to promote the welfare of his own family, who has perhaps at all events attempted to save something for himself, I make a distinction between him and the ne'er-do-well, the unthrifty man, the drunkard, per-

haps, the man who ill uses his family; for him I care not one straw [*cheers*].

It behoves you to look to whom this money is going. I don't think any honest working man — I have never met one — objects to paying his share of a scheme of provision for old age; but it is different if his share is to go to those ne'er-do-wells . . .

When, in 1908, the Old-Age Pensions Act was finally introduced it denied a pension to anyone who had 'habitually failed to work or thriftily make provision for old age'. But how could this be judged fairly? The attempt to do so was soon abandoned. There were also strict limits: only people over the age of seventy with an annual income of £21 or less received the full 5s. a week. Above that income, the pension was scaled down until those with £31 10s. 0d. a year got nothing. A small start, but by March 1909 half a million old people were receiving pensions, desperately needed money, paid for out of taxation, but without the stigma of the Poor Law.

Insurance

The main immediate action taken on the Poor Law itself was the recognition of unemployment as another major cause of poverty. Labour exchanges were set up throughout the country to bring jobs and men together. There were also various schemes and Acts to provide work for those unemployed, though none proved very effective.

There was a new attitude to poverty and a real concern for what Churchill called 'the left-out millions'. Poverty was not just a natural calamity like earthquakes. It was a fault in the running of society that could be cured or, at least, greatly eased.

The most revolutionary illustration of this was the National Insurance Bill of 1911. No country before had compulsorily insured large numbers of workers against sickness and unemployment. Trade unions



There was considerable opposition to the whole idea of old-age pensions particularly in the House of Lords. They would 'weaken the moral fibre of the nation'.



Nevertheless, on 1 January 1909, selected people over seventy presented their 'cheques' for the first weekly instalment of their old-age pensions. The Bill had been brilliantly piloted through by Lloyd George and many older people referred to their pension payments as 'my Lloyd George'.



"WOT I SES IS,
LOOK ARTER
BRITAIN'S
MANHOOD.
LLOYD GEORGE'S
THIRTY BOB
IS WERY USEFUL
\$

Lloyd George, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, fought for National Insurance as the first step in an attack on the inhumanity of nineteenth-century capitalism. 'I do not pretend that this is a complete remedy. . . . It lays bare a good many of those social evils, and forces the state, as a state, to pay attention to them.' Workers now had some degree of protection, not just at work, but when they were ill or unemployed. This great step forward provoked some strong opposition — there were press campaigns, titled ladies instructed their servants to march in protest and rallies at the Albert Hall chanted 'Taffy was a Welshman, Taffy was a thief'.

But the 'Welsh wizard' won, as he had over old-age pensions.

and friendly societies had done it in the past for their members, but not on such a large scale.

Unlike the Old-Age Pension Act, where the cost came out of taxation, this scheme had contributions from employer, employee and government. Part one dealt with sickness, part two with unemployment.

Financing benefits from these three sources had a profound effect in the future. There is nothing sacred about this idea, but once introduced it has dominated all subsequent improvements. It would have been quite possible to devise a scheme where the government bore all the cost out of taxation. Many people argued at the time that this would have been fairer — taxation mainly comes from the better off, whereas contributions came mainly from the poor (the scheme only applied to those earning less than £160 p.a. — raised to £250 p.a. in 1919).

Insurance, though, made the whole idea respectable — people were not getting something for nothing. They were certainly getting more than they would have done if they had insured themselves against sickness individually. State health insurance gave them '9d. for 4d.' in Lloyd George's phrase. The individual paid 4d., the employer 3d. and the state 2d. In return, the contributor joined the 'panel' of a doctor in the scheme and got free treatment from him, though his family still had to pay. He also got sickness benefit for periods off work.

The unemployment insurance worked similarly, but benefit was limited to one week for each five contributions paid. It covered only seven industries at first, but was gradually extended over the following years to all of them.

By 1914 old-age pensions had started, the Poor

Law was being humanized and the worst effects of sickness and unemployment mitigated. All this despite often hysterical opposition. In addition, a school health service and school meals had been started, including free meals for children from poor families.

War and the poor

This gradual progress towards welfare was interrupted by the First World War. Suddenly, any problem seemed trivial in comparison with winning the war. When it ended, the picture had changed.

The war caused the suffering of all wars, thousands of disabled men and widowed women. It also produced a massive inflation that, of course, hit the poor hardest. When the war ended, a pound bought roughly a third of what it had in 1914. Although the problem had got worse, people were confident that everything would change for the better after the war. 'Homes fit for heroes' was Lloyd George's slogan, as we have seen, and these homes were to be free from want. That was the hope. The reality was different.

At first, everything seemed to be going well. The Reconstruction Programme planned by Lloyd George's government promised a new Britain. Wartime full employment continued and wages were held at wartime levels by law. National insurance was extended to another eight million workers and now covered most wage-earners. A National Industrial Conference between unions and employers discussed a forty-eight-hour week, improved conditions and other reforms. Trade boomed.

The slump

It all came to nothing. By 1921 a slump had sent unemployment soaring higher than it had been this century. By the end of 1921, there were nearly two million unemployed. No one had a remedy for a disaster of this size. The National Insurance Acts were not



YESTERDAY-THE TRENCHES TO-DAY-UNEMPLOYED

Ex-soldiers of 1914-18 too ill to work but somehow not entitled to pensions; men hurt in the pits, able at most for light work but no light work available and compensation being stopped. Women living in two-roomed cottages with one of the rooms so damp that the water made rivulets down the wall and the whole family had to huddle together, sleeping and waking, day and night, when they were sick and when they were well, all in the one apartment. Old people hungry because they could not spin out their ten-shilling pension even as supplemented by a shilling or two from the Public Assistance Board to cover food and fuelling to the end of the week. Unemployed men in areas where no work was available cut off benefit for 'not genuinely seeking work'. Lads stranded, workless, penniless in Australia or Canada and wondering how they could get home. Other lads unemployed at home and wondering how they could get out to the fine openings that the papers talked about in the Dominions. Women in new council houses, worried and frightened out of their wits as they made the discovery that it now took more for lighting, cooking, heating and the barest repairs than they had had to budget for in their old houses and finding themselves shorter on food rations than they had ever been in their lives before.

from Tomorrow is a New Day by Jennie Lee

Ex-service men sang in the streets or sold matches or balloons. They marched in protest at the lack of jobs. They campaigned for better benefits. The slump went on.

What's Life Like on the Countryside?

WORK—WORK—WORK
HUNGER—POVERTY—SICKNESS

Where can you go when you are stiff with rheumatism and old with hardship long before you are seventy?

TO THE WORKHOUSE.



Where can you go when you're ill?
TO THE WORKHOUSE.

The Wages Board gone and wages down in some cases as low as 25s a week.

DOWN—DOWN—DOWN

Worth less than 15s before the War.



designed to cope with unemployment on this scale. The whole theory of the system was that contributions paid by people when they were in work would finance benefits for them when they were out of work. But, of course, many of those needing to draw benefits had never had the chance of being in work long enough to pay the necessary contributions. The scheme started going rapidly into the red. People were told that, if they had not paid in enough, they could not draw much out. They and their families must go to parish relief from the Poor Law. Not surprisingly, ex-soldiers, promised homes for heroes, marched and protested — often violently — through hunger marches and the National Unemployed Workers Committee movements. The exact conditions under which the unemployed could draw benefits started to vary — they 'improved' when Parliament was alarmed at the menace, and worsened when it considered the cost'.

A right to welfare benefits?

Vehement debate raged about the whole nature of the insurance fund — how much the benefits should be, how long they could be drawn for, whether the fund could go into the red. These questions of extra pennies and extra weeks were great matters of principle as well. Did the unemployed have a *right* to benefits for as long as they were unemployed, or only for as long as they had paid contributions for?

This basic argument was never resolved: at times they were better treated, at times worse. In 1922 there was a rigid distinction between 'covenanted' (that is, when you had paid in contributions) and 'uncovenanted' benefits. The latter, angrily nicknamed the 'dole', was given only at the discretion of the Ministry of Labour. Two years later both came as a right, but were different in amount. In 1927, in the aftermath of the General Strike, benefits could be

The despair of long-term unemployment is caught in Walter Greenwood's novel, *Love on the Dole*. It is not just the lack of money, not just the boredom, not just the feeling of uselessness – it is the feeling that this waste will stretch on year after year, without hope of escape, while skill and ambition and energy ebb away. Harry has been an engineering apprentice – as soon as his training finished he lost his job and has not found another:

He stared up at the huge building furtively, licked his lips and ran a finger round his scarf: 'Aw, God, just let me get a job. Ah don't care if it's on'y half pay,' he found comfort in this conversation: kept it up: 'An' if you can't find me a job Ah wish y'd mek Helen see it like as though it won't be for long. Ah mean, that if Ah don't get a job t'day let me get one soon. . . . Blimey, suppose she gets fed up wi' me if Ah'm out o' collar long. Suppose she gets another bloke who's workin'. . . . Gor Blimey, Ah ne'er thought o' that.'

Some of the works anticipated such callers as he; there were notices at the entrances: 'No Hands Wanted'.

He ignored them. You never knew but what somebody had just been sacked.

'Please sir, d' y' want any hands?' A holding of the breath, an anxious stare.

'Do we hell as like. Go on, sod off. Can't y' read? Blimey, we're sackin' 'em ourselves. An' don't bang the door when y' go out, either, or Ah'll be after you an' kick y'r backside.'

There were no more places to visit. . . . 'Ah'm not workin'. . . . Ah'm out o' work.' Someone else had his place at Marlowe's and no other firm required him. He was *out*.

At first Harry had his 'dole' to replace his wages. Then one day it stopped. He queued up at the Public Assistance Office to find out what had happened. The man in front of him was there for the same reason.

The manager ordered a clerk to look up the man's particulars; the clerk handed over some documents after a search in a filing cabinet. His superior, after perusing some notes written upon the forms, looked at the applicant and said: 'You've a couple of sons living with you who are working, haven't you?'

'Aye,' the man answered: 'One's earnin' twenty-five bob an' t'other a couple o' quid, when they work a full week. An' th' eldest. . . .'

'In view of this fact,' the manager interrupted: 'The Public Assistance Committee have ruled your household's aggregate income sufficient for your needs; therefore, your claim for transitional benefit is disallowed.' He turned from the man to glance interrogatively at Harry.

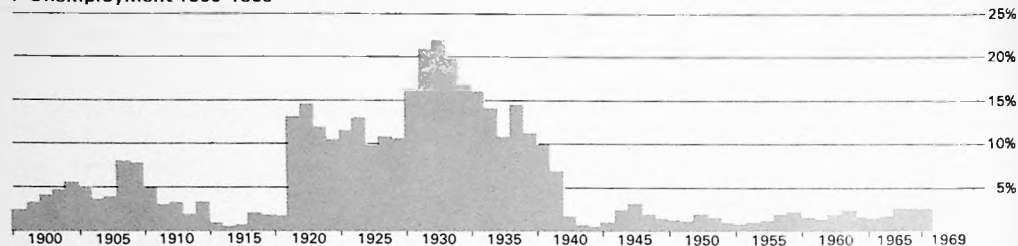
The man flushed: 'The swine,' he shouted: 'Th' eldest lad's gettin' wed . . . 'as 'e t' keep me an' th' old woman?' raising his fist: 'Ah'll. . . . But the attendant policeman collared him and propelled him outside, roughly, ignoring his loud protestations.

Harry learnt that, in the opinion of the Public Assistance Committee his father's dole and Sally's wages were sufficient to keep him. No more dole would be forthcoming. And when he asked whether he could re-state his case the manager informed him that there was no appeal. He didn't argue; went outside, dazed.

from Walter Greenwood, *Love on the Dole*



1 Unemployment 1900-1969

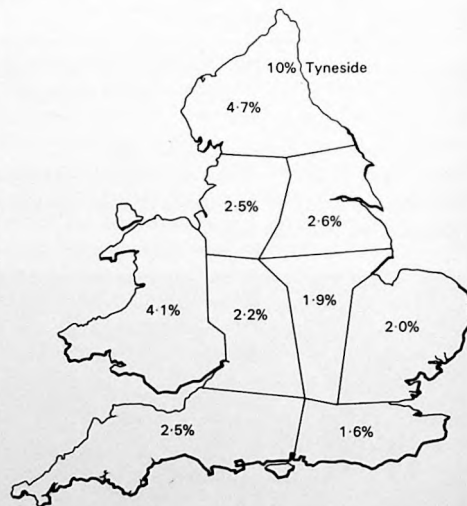


2 Working days lost through industrial disputes 1900-1969

figures in thousands



3 Unemployment by regions 1968

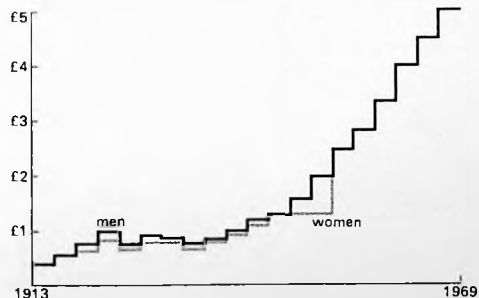


Unemployment, though far lower than earlier this century (1), is still a serious problem in parts of the country and usually the parts that have suffered in the past like Tyne-side (3).

Unemployment benefit (4) has seldom been particularly generous — compare these rates with average earnings at the time (p. 86). In the thirties to live on the dole was a desperate struggle (5). It meant bread and margarine, corned beef, tea, potatoes — an unbalanced diet, which was reflected in the bad teeth and poor physique of those who had to live on it.



4 Unemployment benefit



5 On the dole 1930s

'Full benefit'

Single man	17s.
Wife	9s.
Each child below 14	3s.

32s.

after insurance
stamps exhausted

'Transitional benefit' From the Unemployment Assistance Board

Single man	15s.
Man and wife	24s.
Children, 14-18	6s.
Children, 11-14	4s. 6d.
Children, 8-11	4s.
Children, 5-8	3s. 6d.
Children, 3-5	3s.

37s. 6d.

after twenty-six
weeks

Public Assistance Committee

Single man	12s. 6d.
Man and wife	23s.
Elddest child	4s.
Any other child	3s.

33s.

Weekly budget

Rent	9s. 0d.
Clothing club	3s. 0d.
Coal	2s. 0d.
Gas	1s. 3d.
Milk	103d.
Union fees	3d.
Insurance (on the children)	2d.
Meat	3s. 4d.
Flour (two stone)	4d.
Yeast	1s. 0d.
Potatoes	10d.
Dripping	10d.
Margarine	1s. 2d.
Bacon	1s. 9d.
Sugar	1s. 0d.
Tea	73d.
Jam	6d.
Peas and cabbage	4d.
Carrots and onions	43d.
Quaker oats	10d.
Soap, powders, blue etc.	10d.
Total	£1 12s. 0d.

In the morning, half an hour before opening time, Dorothy went to the nearest public library to look at the advertisements in the newspapers. Already a score of vaguely mangy-looking people were prowling up and down, and the number swelled by ones and twos till there were no less than sixty. Presently the doors of the library opened, and in they all surged, racing for a board at the other end of the reading-room where the 'Situations Vacant' columns from various newspapers had been cut out and pinned up. And in the wake of the job-hunters came poor old bundles of rags, men and women both, who had spent the night in the streets and came to the library to sleep. They came shambling in behind the others, flopped down with grunts of relief at the nearest table, and pulled the nearest periodical towards them; it might be the *Free Church Messenger*, it might be the *Vegetarian Sentinel*—it didn't matter what it was, but you couldn't stay in the library unless you pretended to be reading. They opened their papers, and in the same instant fell asleep, with their chins on their breasts. And the attendant walked round prodding

them in turn like a stoker poking a succession of fires, and they grunted and woke up as he prodded them, and then fell asleep again the instant he had passed.

Meanwhile a battle was raging round the advertisement board, everybody struggling to get to the front. Two young men in blue overalls came running up behind the others, and one of them put his head down and fought his way through the crowd as though it had been a football scrum. In a moment he was at the board. He turned to his companion: 'Ere we are, Joe—I got it! 'Mechanics wanted—Locke's Garage, Camden Town.' 'C'm on out of it!' He fought his way out again, and both of them scooted for the door. They were going to Camden Town as fast as their legs would carry them. And at this moment, in every public library in London, mechanics out of work were reading that identical notice and starting on the race for the job, which in all probability had already been given to someone who could afford to buy a paper for himself and had seen the notice at six in the morning.

from *A Clergyman's Daughter* by George Orwell



withheld if applicants were 'not genuinely seeking work', but there was seldom any work to seek. The suffering and anger caused by this were immense. The 1929 government abolished it but, as the crisis got worse, introduced instead a Family Means Test.

The Means Test

A man drew the full benefit as a right — he had paid in for it. But 'transitional benefit' or payments from the Public Assistance Committee depended on a means test: the other sources of income the family had (the family, note, not the individual). The earnings of grown-up children still living at home or the pensions of elderly parents all had to be counted.

The humiliation of living off your child's earnings was bad enough, but the Means Test had worse effects, as George Orwell wrote in *The Road to Wigan Pier*:

Old people, sometimes bedridden, are driven out of their homes by it. An old-age pensioner, for instance, if a widower, would normally live with one or other of his children; his weekly ten shillings goes towards the household expenses, and probably he is not badly cared for. Under the Means Test, however, he counts as a 'lodger' and if he stays at home his children's dole will be docked. So, perhaps at seventy or seventy-five years of age, he has to turn out into lodgings, handing his pension over to the lodging-house keeper and existing on the verge of starvation. I have seen several cases of this myself. It is happening all over England at this moment, thanks to the Means Test.

No work

It was not that there was unwillingness to help those who were suffering. Far from it — the government was a Labour one anxious to do something for them. It was not that there was ignorance of the cause of poverty. What was lacking was any knowledge of what to do. The sheer magnitude of the problem was staggering — at the depth of the slump in September 1932 between

six and seven million people were dependent on the 'dole' — men who could not find work, plus their wives and families. Not just for a week or two or a month or two — in Wigan, for instance, four or five thousand miners stayed continuously unemployed for over eight years. During the thirties one in three of all workers was out of work for some part of the time, many of them for long periods. The coal they mined, or the products they helped manufacture, could not be sold, so there was no work for them until 'times got better'.

The great economist, John Maynard Keynes, kept urging that it was possible for the government to prevent unemployment by its policies. The debate about welfare was opening out into new fields — helping the unemployed by providing employment in public works such as roads. Unemployment benefits, even generous ones, are no substitute for work. Certain parts of the country that were particularly badly hit were classified as 'Special Areas' and various attempts were made to provide more jobs there. It is an undertaking that still continues. Every year the government allocates large grants of money to encourage firms to set up new factories on Tyneside or Cumberland or parts of Scotland and Northern Ireland where unemployment is still higher than in the rest of the country.

Unemployment is now, of course, far lower than it was in the thirties, but it is often difficult to make a region prosperous again when some of its traditional industries are no longer needed. When the idea was first put forward that the government could do something about unemployment in this way, it was too revolutionary. Unemployment continued. It was only eliminated when the demands of the Second World War created the extra jobs that Keynes had been arguing that the government should create anyway.

The Beveridge Report

It was during the last war that a report was prepared

The *Daily Mail* described the Report as 'half a dozen social revolutions rolled into one'. In a year 665,000 copies were sold of the various English language editions, to say nothing of numerous translations. At last there was 'a confident assurance that the poor need not always be with us'.

that had a profound importance for the future welfare state — the Beveridge Report. The war was being fought to defend freedom, but what was freedom? It was certainly safety from invasion, the right to choose a government and to speak and write openly without fear of censorship or secret police. But it was more than that:

What art thou Freedom? Thou art bread
And a comely table spread.
Thou art clothes and fire and food
To the trampled multitude.

Or, as Beveridge expressed it, there were Five Freedoms — Freedom from Want, from Disease, from Ignorance, Squalor and Idleness. His Report showed how governments could achieve these freedoms for everyone. Want arose mainly from unemployment, old age or from being part of a large family: there must be better unemployment benefits (including cover for people not in the existing schemes), better pensions and some sort of family allowance. Disease could be conquered by a national health service; ignorance by an improved system of education; squalor by better housing and town planning; idleness by a policy of full employment. Practically all benefits could apply to all citizens, regardless of income. There would thus be freedom from the stigma of the Poor Law, too.

The welcome for the Beveridge Report was phenomenal, but the war had yet to be won. A Ministry of National Insurance was set up and a Family Allowances Bill introduced. Further action had to await a new post-war government.

The National Health Service

The Labour Party had pledged itself to carry out Beveridge's proposals and was swept into office in 1945 with a landslide majority. The Welfare State, hinted at in earlier legislation, was at last being

built. Only family allowances were a really new idea (new in Britain; they had existed in France since 1932); the other measures were major developments of existing ideas.

The kingpin was the National Health Service. It was a radical re-organization of all the health resources of the country — those run by the local authorities, the Poor Law, voluntary bodies, doctors — into one coherent free service that would 'bring the country's full resources to bear upon reducing ill-health and promoting good health in all its citizens'. After long and often acrimonious discussion the new service was organized in three parts: the family doctors; the hospitals; and local authority services like child welfare clinics, midwives and home nursing. Ideally all three should have worked more closely together, but the doctors refused to be under the local authorities or 'become civil servants'. Aneurin Bevan, Minister of Health, nevertheless triumphantly succeeded in his aim: a service that made medical care available free to all.

The end of the Poor Law

Of all the Acts, perhaps the most dramatic words were to be found in the introduction to the National Assistance Act: 'the existing Poor Law shall cease to have effect'. At last, after hundreds of years, there was an end to the whole idea that 'paupers' were to be treated differently from other people. The system had long been under attack, and many services for the poor had already been absorbed into those provided by local authorities for everyone. Gradually, people had come to speak not of 'the poor' but of 'the unemployed', 'the old', 'the homeless', 'the sick' — recognizing that people were poor for different reasons and therefore required different remedies. The National Assistance Act finally abolished the workhouse. Its work was split up. National Assistance offices would

Daily Mirror

DEC 2

12.150

ONE PENNY

Printed at the G.P.O. as a Newspaper.

Allies separate Axis armies in Africa

AMERICAN and French forces were reported last night to have driven a wedge between the two Axis armies in North Africa—between Nehring, fighting to the west, and Rommel, at bay at El Alamein.

Messages from North Africa and New York stated that the Allies have reached the Tunisian coast between Gabes and Sfax.

Nehring's land communications with Tripoli—where the German Sixth Army is preparing for the next big attack by General Montgomery's Eighth Army—have thus been cut off.

French forces are reported to



O, rare and refreshing Beveridge!

Beveridge tells how to

BANISH WANT

Cradle to grave plan All pay—all benefit

SIR WILLIAM BEVERIDGE'S Report, aimed at abolishing Want in Britain, is published today.

He calls his Plan for Social Security a revolution under which "every citizen willing to serve according to his powers has at all times an income sufficient to meet his responsibilities."

Here are his chief proposals:

All social insurance—unemployment, health, pensions—lumped into one weekly contribution for all citizens without income limit—from duke to dustman.

These payments, in the case of employees, would be:

Men 4s. 3d. Employer 3s. 3d.

Women 3s. 6d. Employer 2s. 6d.

Cradle to the grave benefits for all.

Including:

Free medical, dental, eyesight and hospital treatment;

Children's allowances of 8s. a week each, after the first child.

Increases in unemployment benefit (40s. for a couple) and abolition of the means test; Industrial pension in place of workmen's compensation.

A charter for housewives, including marriage grant up to £10; maternity grant of £4 (and 36s. for 13 weeks for a paid worker); widow's benefit; separation and divorce provision; free domestic help in time of sickness.

Old age pensions rising to 40s. for a married couple on retirement.

Funeral grants up to £20.

To work the scheme a new Ministry of Social Security would open Security Offices within reach of every Citizen.

The 1d.-a-week-collected-at-the-door insurance schemes of the big companies would be taken over by the State.

Sir William says the Plan depends on a prosperous Britain, but claims that it can begin by July 1, 1944, if planning begins at once.

Govt. give hint of post-war planning

CHOOSING the eve of the publication of Sir William Beveridge's long-awaited report on Social Security, the Government yesterday gave the country its first indication of their own plans for post-war Britain.

These include the continuance of rationing for some time and control of industry (some industries being taken over as public corporations); the development of agriculture, forestry and public utilities like electricity.

The Government also announced the immediate setting up of a new Ministry of Town and Country Planning, and the rejection of the Scott and Fitzwilliam Committees' proposals for placing main responsibility for planning in the hands of a permanent commission.

Victory First

Sir William Jowitt, Paymaster-General, answering a debate on reconstruction in the House of Commons, said:

"We must not allow ourselves to be distracted by talk of reconstruction from the stern task of securing victory."

THE MISFIT

Comment

Kick from
Crossman

Updated by Mr. Richard
Crossman in a Press Mail
on 11.11.1981. The original
was published in 1961.

Boy of 7 locked in mental hospital with 2,500 adults

By
BARRY LONGWILL

A BOY of seven
was left in a
mental hospital
for seven weeks—
the only child
among nearly
2,500 adult
patients.

give cash payments to people in need. Local authorities would run old people's homes and similar facilities for people needing special kinds of help or accommodation, some able to pay for it themselves and some not. The workhouse, as a place of shame that the old feared and avoided, had gone for good.

At the same time, the Children's Act safeguarded another group whose needs had scarcely been recognized in previous years. In 1945 a little boy, Dennis O'Neill, had been boarded out with foster-parents and was so brutally treated that he died. The resulting outcry produced a Parliamentary Committee 'to inquire into existing methods of providing for children who from loss of parents or from any cause whatever are deprived of a normal home life with their own parents or relatives'.

The Report, published the following year, read like something out of Dickens — the jumbling together in the same workhouse of senile old men, pregnant women, mental cases and babies of a few weeks old. In one Poor Law building over a hundred years old, a hundred and seventy adults, including senile old people and mental defectives lived with

twenty-seven children, aged six months to fifteen years. Twelve infants up to the age of eighteen months were the children of women in the institution, about half

of them still being nursed by their mothers. In the same room in which these children were being cared for was a Mongol idiot, aged four, of gross appearance, for whom there was apparently no accommodation elsewhere. A family of five normal children, aged about six to fifteen, who had been admitted on a relieving officer's order, had been in the institution for ten weeks. This family, including a boy of ten and a girl of fifteen, were sleeping in the same room as a three-year-old hydrocephalic idiot of very unsightly type, whose bed was screened off in a corner.

Conditions here and elsewhere were indescribable — drab, dirty, few staff, bad buildings, little inspection by the authorities responsible and even less action. Although local authorities already had to act as 'substitute parents' for children in their charge, they were clearly doing it badly. The 1948 Children's Act set up Children's Departments in local authorities with specific responsibility for the welfare of children, to care for them in properly supervised homes or foster homes. Another group of 'the poor' had at last been recognized and their needs catered for properly.

Perhaps, however, the most important change was not actually in any of these Acts. It was the final acceptance implied in all of them that the modern state should be responsible for the welfare of all its citizens. It was the commitment by all post-war governments to maintain full employment. It was the assumption underlying most discussions of welfare today — not whether help should be given, but how.

Cases akin to that of Dennis O'Neill are not unknown today.

Welfare

All societies have some people who cannot support themselves: the old, the sick, orphaned children. All societies, too, have developed some way or other of coping with the problem. Married children can be made to support their parents, orphaned children can be taken into the family of relatives, or into the service of the chief or the landlord, and so on. In almost all societies, however primitive, arrangements can be made to support people who have suffered a misfortune — neighbours, for example, can contribute food and clothing, and the landlord or his wife can send money or food.

But all these 'welfare' systems depend a great deal on the goodwill of people living in small communities. In a small village, where everyone knows each other, it is easy to agree on helping the unfortunate: next year, after all, it could be you needing help. But what about a city?

- 1834** The Report of the Royal Commission on the Poor Law. The policy since 1795 of supplementing inadequate wages by giving poor relief had the result of keeping wages down, pauperizing labourers, almost ruining the ratepayers, and benefitting only the larger farmers who were being subsidized by everyone else. The rising numbers on poor relief and widespread discontent required government action.
- 1834** Poor Law Amendment Act incorporated many of the Commission's recommendations.
- 1848** The first Public Health Act set up a national Board of Health in London and local boards in other towns.
- 1905–9** Royal Commission on the Poor Law. The Majority Report wanted a situation where the poor were treated separately, as before, while the Minority Report thought that a comprehensive welfare service should be provided for everyone.
- 1908** Old-Age Pension Act made pensions payable to people from the age of seventy under a certain income. The money for these pensions came from taxation.
- 1911** The first National Insurance Act provided insurance against sickness and unemployment for lower paid workers. Contributions came from the employee, employer and the government.
- 1918** Maternity and Child Welfare Act.
- 1920** Unemployment Insurance Act extended the 1911 scheme to other workers.
- 1925** Old-age pensions included in the National Insurance scheme and made contributory.
- 1927, 1930 and 1934** Unemployment Insurance Acts in these years made the conditions for receiving benefits more stringent, as the number of unemployed rose.
- 1929** Poor Law Guardians abolished and Public Assistance Committees set up by county councils.
- 1942** Report of the Beveridge Committee recommended a comprehensive national health scheme for '... every citizen without exception, without remuneration limit and without an economic barrier'.
- 1945** Family Allowances Act provided 5s. a week for each child except the eldest.
- 1946** National Insurance (Industrial Injuries) Bill aimed '... to make compensation for industrial injuries part of this country's social services'.
- 1946** The National Insurance Act in this year replaced existing insurance and pensions schemes and provided for '... payments by way of unemployment benefits, sickness benefits, maternity benefits, retirement pension, widow's benefit, guardian's allowances and death grant'.
- 1946** National Health Service Act laid down that hospitals (transferred from local authorities and voluntary bodies) were to be administered by regional hospital boards; doctors and dentists by executive councils; other health services such as child welfare, health visitors, home help etc. by local authorities. Most of these services were to be free.
- 1948** National Assistance Act marked the end of the Poor Law.
- 1948** Children's Act made local authorities responsible for children without adequate homes.
- 1948** National Health Service and new National Insurance schemes put into operation.
- 1949** National Health Service (Amendment) Act introduced charges for certain parts of the health service such as prescriptions spectacles and dental treatment. The level of charges has changed at various times since.
- 1959** The National Insurance Act in this year introduced a graduated pensions scheme partially relating contributions and pensions to salary level.
- 1966** The National Insurance Act in this year made earnings-related supplements payable in addition to sickness or unemployment benefits.
- 1966** Ministry of Social Security Act amalgamated the Ministry of Pensions and the National Assistance Board into a new Ministry of Social Security. More generous supplementary benefits were provided by this Act.
- 1971** New benefits to help the chronically sick.

6 Today and tomorrow

The main structure of the Welfare State today was created in the years 1945–8. It built on previous legislation (particularly that of 1906–11) and it has been modified since, but not in its essential outlines.

The Acts passed by the post-war Labour Government seemed to many people a once-for-all achievement. This is a tribute to their far-reaching nature, but completely misunderstands the nature of the problem. Questions of poverty, housing and welfare are never 'solved' — there must always be new advances. Social conditions change and there are new needs to be met. Standards change and what was once adequate is no longer so. It took nearly twenty years for this truth to seep in.

Priorities

There were some strange misconceptions at the start. The National Health Service was expected by many people to be a large lump sum catching up on past neglect. It would then cost comparatively little because of the improvements in people's health. This view was held by many intelligent politicians and doctors in 1948: it is ridiculous in the light of current spending. In fact, possible spending on the health service is quite simply limitless. We will never be without new and urgent demands for money. New discoveries mean that conditions previously thought hopeless can now be tackled — kidney machines, heart transplants and other advances in 'spare-part surgery' are a particularly dramatic example. The limits on the National Health Service arise not from what doctors want to do, but from what politicians will let them do. Only a certain number of trained people and a certain amount of money can be spared for health services.

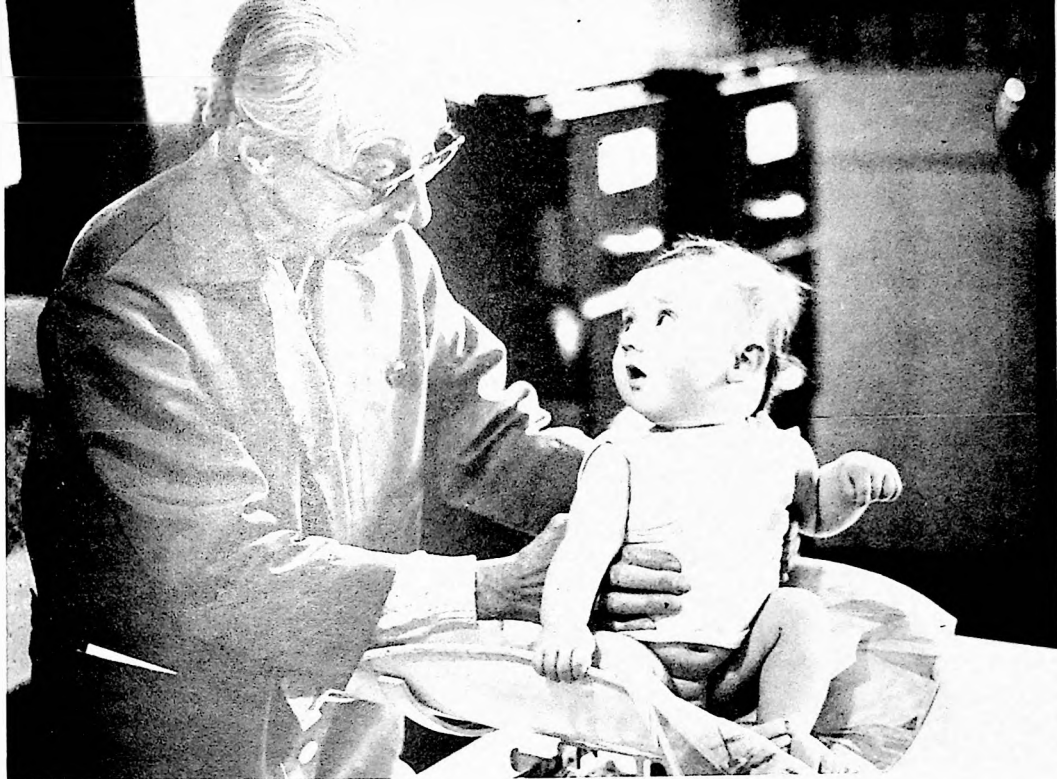
The creation of the Welfare State, in other words,

has not freed us from the problem of priorities. Money spent on one thing cannot be spent simultaneously on another, however desirable they both are. The recognition that the State has a responsibility for health, housing and welfare is a great advance, but it does not ensure automatically that enough is spent on them or spent to the best advantage. There is still the need for constant investigation and argument — to discover people still left out, and to question whether limited resources are being used in the best way.

Paying old-age pensions does not mean that no elderly people are in want — that depends on the amount of the pension and whether it keeps pace with rises in the cost of living. If it does not (and it seldom has), there is good reason to agitate for it to be increased. But money for a general increase in pensions may, harsh though it is to say so, be better spent on someone else. Disabled housewives get no pension at all, despite the strain on their families. Whose need is greater? To say 'give it to them both' may be the immediate humane response, but for the government to do so means either higher taxation (and there are few volunteers for that) or taking the money from some other activity such as education or defence or roads, all of which have equally dedicated defenders of every penny spent.

Problems

We need more money spent on welfare, but it is difficult to get it. There is no great public pressure — people are aware that large amounts are spent every year but less aware that there is still a lot to be done. The difficulty today is not the nineteenth-century belief that the poor had only themselves to blame and should not be helped. This idea, though not quite dead, is certainly less important than the widespread impression that the mere existence of



Local authority welfare services have long looked after the physical health of children. It was recognized early this century that undernourishment or lack of important vitamins could permanently harm children. School dinners, free milk, welfare clinics and welfare food became part of the social services. It is only recently that there has been equal concern about the development of a child's brain and imagination. Does he have space to play? Books in the home? Other children to meet? Adults to talk and read to him? If not he will be at a disadvantage for the rest of his schooling. Playgroups are one answer. But far too few of them are yet available to the deprived children who need them most.



the Welfare State has solved everything. The idea that 'there are not really many poor people today' is strong. It comes as a shock to realize that there are over a million children in need, and over two million homes without bathrooms.

There is a tendency to assume that three things always follow one from another: recognizing a problem, doing something about it, and solving it. The sad truth is that a problem can be recognized for years without anything much being done about it (for example, building special housing for old people). Even more depressing, massive amounts of energy and money can be put into tackling it; but it remains unsolved (for example, slum clearance). It proves far more vast and complicated than anyone originally realized.

The future problems of the Welfare State fall into two separate categories:

1. Particular hardships that still get little or no help.
2. Much more puzzling questions of the whole philosophy and purpose of the Welfare State today.

Every so often a particular problem hits the headlines and produces some action. A few years ago the television programme, *Cathy Come Home*, roused people to awareness of the desperate situation of many people who are homeless. Shelter constantly reminds us that there is still a great deal of very bad housing. The Child Poverty Action Group has shown just how poorly fed, clothed and housed children in large families can be: family allowances were increased in 1968 as a result of this effort. The Disablement Income Group has highlighted the difficulties of disabled people with wheelchair rallies in Trafalgar Square. Eventually the 1970 Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons

Act made local authorities responsible for providing special help for disabled people — for example, a simple but vital aid such as a telephone, adapted if necessary, to help them keep in touch.

These are not new problems — all that happened was that an old problem was at last brought to people's notice. Drawing attention to problems is one reason why charities are still important even in a welfare state.

Spongers

There has, however, been no demand for a general surge forward in welfare spending. On the contrary, there is worry about the mounting cost of many existing services. Faced with soaring costs alongside continuing distress, critics have asked whether the money is being spent to best advantage. If people who need help are not getting it, is it because others get benefits they don't need? Are people abusing the service by drawing unemployment benefits when they could be working? Are they getting supplementary benefits when they really have enough money of their own? Are there, as certain newspapers claim, thousands of 'spongers'?

Ministry recruits another
100 special investigators

War on the spongers

moment
Mr Cox's
bad apple

By RICHARD WHITHEAD

A HUNDRED more
investigators are being
appointed to crack
down on Social
Security scroungers.

Obviously no one wants to waste public money on people who don't need it. But a great deal said on this subject comes from people hostile to the whole idea of state help for the unfortunate. In the first place, spongers, though individual cases are seized upon in newspapers, get a minute proportion of the money spent. In the second, to employ enough officials to guard ruthlessly against it would cost more than is wasted at present. But third, and most important, it is impossible to combine a humane approach to people in misfortune with the *certain* detection of spongers. A searching and humiliating interrogation, reminiscent of the Means Test between the wars, is bound to discourage people in genuine need of help from applying for it. People have their self-respect and they would rather keep that than get help at the expense of it. Many old-age pensioners do not apply for the supplementary pensions to which they are entitled for this reason. A system of welfare that is harsh and unsympathetic like the nineteenth-century workhouse is economical, but at the expense of suffering. A system of welfare that is too easy-going wastes money. A balance has to be struck. There is no evidence that present regulations are too easy-going. Indeed, in some respects, they are clearly still tilted in the opposite direction.

Wage-stop

There is one quite frequent case of hardship today that illustrates contradictory attitudes that exist side by side in the Welfare State. Many thousands of families where the father is sick or unemployed are regularly given less money than the amount laid down by the State as the minimum they need to live on. This does not happen by accident, but by the deliberate policy of the 'wage-stop'. A man cannot draw, when out of work, more than the average wage he was getting while in work. Very reasonable you might

Without the Welfare State Mrs Seeley's family would have collapsed. With it they barely manage to keep going. She is a widow with thirteen children in a dark, damp, decaying house in Birmingham, rent £2-45. She gets £29-90 in allowances, spends over £20 a week on food and £4-70 on fuel. That leaves under £3 for clothes from secondhand shops and all other expenses.



think — people must be encouraged to work rather than not work. But in fact many jobs are extremely badly paid — not really a living wage. The State says in effect: 'We know that you really need this much for yourself and your family to live on — we give it to other people. But because you could not find a job that was decently paid we are not going to

give it to you. We will keep you on the same money as you got in your job, even though we know it is not enough.' The spirit of 'less eligibility' and the work-house is not dead.

This immediately raises another question. Is a Welfare State that only safeguards people's income when they are out of work sufficient? Do we need better safeguards for certain people in work whose bargaining power is not good enough to get adequate wages councils in certain industries (see p. 46), but working conditions, hours of work, holidays and so on — shouldn't it pay more attention to how much they earn as well? There is some regulation through wages councils in certain industries (see p. 46), but one piece of unfinished business in the Welfare State is the question of a minimum wage for everyone. It is a subject that bristles with difficulties.

Universal or selective welfare

In fact, most aspects of the future development of the Welfare State bristle with difficulties. Not least, the major criticism of the whole structure: that it is wasteful because it is 'universal' rather than 'selective'. Everyone gets old-age pensions, family allowances, welfare foods, free medical services and so on. Obviously this includes many people who are comfortably off or even rich. Why should they get services free for which they could afford to pay? And if they did pay, wouldn't there be a great deal more money to help those who are really in need?

Many aspects of the Welfare State were devised when life was very different from today. Unemployment plagued the twenties and thirties, but our main welfare problems seem more and more likely to be mental health and old age. The increasing number of elderly people in the population create quite different demands. First, they need new services such as special housing, chiropody, meals-on-wheels, visiting,

physiotherapy. Second, they are not earning any money to pay for these services. The cost is heavy and, if the services become as good as they need to be, will get heavier.

Could money be saved? Are some other services still needed? Why give family allowances to rich people who don't need them? Why subsidize school meals for everyone when most parents can afford to pay the full cost? With more or less full employment, more money, better clothing and better food many families could do without free milk or subsidized rents. They could afford to pay for treatment in hospital.

Much of this is undeniably true. It would be unpopular, but quite possible, to start charging people directly for what they now get 'for free'. (It is not, of course, free; they pay for it in taxes and rates.) Would it be a good idea?

There are difficulties. If benefits are selective, will those who are entitled to them ever hear about them or apply for them? Many of those involved will be the least educated and least self-confident members of the community. The rate rebate scheme is a good example. The people entitled to it could do with every extra penny, but many either did not hear of it or do not know how to claim their due.

In some cases people will be ashamed to claim what is due to them because it means publicly acknowledging that they are poor. No one minds collecting an old-age pension, because everyone gets it. Many people hate collecting Supplementary Benefit or applying for free school meals or rate rebates. Such attitudes may be unreasonable, but any approach to welfare that does not take account of them will be ignoring reality.

Selective welfare services could create two grades of service. One grade for which people pay and another, inferior grade which is free. If everyone uses

the same service, influential and articulate people in the community will have a personal incentive to press for its standard to be as high as possible. If they can opt out of it by paying for something better, the free service could become a new Poor Law where customers have to take what they get.

Selectivity has its dangers, but the cost of the Welfare State is high and getting higher. There is, in fact, already an element of selectivity in what seem to be universal benefits. Old-age pensions are paid to everyone, but are part of taxable income, so richer pensioners lose part of theirs in tax. Similarly, when family allowances were increased in 1968, everyone got the extra money, but better-off families lost it again in tax. This may seem rather clumsy, but it made sure that, without fuss or humiliation, those who needed the money got it and those who didn't had it taken away again. Techniques like this recognize the difficulty of reaching those in need and of helping them while respecting their feelings. Selectivity must be humane and effective, not simply a method of saving money at the expense of the unfortunate.

Reforming the Welfare State

There are two dangers when discussing the modern Welfare State. Some people fiercely defend all its existing features without recognizing that times have changed and that there may be new needs or new techniques to meet old needs. Others assume too readily that many problems have vanished and that those remaining can be tackled cheaply or easily. Our understanding of the nature of poverty is still sketchy.

Twenty-five years ago the acts that set up our present local authority welfare services completed 'the break up of the Poor Law'. Separate departments called Welfare, Children's Department, Housing, Health, Education deal with all aspects of their

particular field. There is no segregation in the treatment of poor people and anyone else. The stigma of 'pauper' services has been removed.

Like so many reforms, however, this break up was not *wholly* beneficial. It was necessary to realize that poverty can have many different causes that require particular remedies. But equally many problems cluster together — a child in the care of the Children's Department may be there because of bad housing, or a family may have a whole complex of problems through poor health, no job, children playing truant, rent arrears — which involve welfare workers from several departments.

Departments already work together, but they could do so more effectively. So in 1968 the Ministries of Health and Social Services were merged as a new Ministry of Social Security and local authorities are now amalgamating their health, children's and welfare departments in a similar way.

In a sense the Poor Law is being put together again — one department providing most of the services for those in misfortune, but run in a spirit that does not destroy self-respect. That is the intention. We must ensure that it is also the reality.

These changes will go on. Reforms, and then reforms of the reforms. For this story has no end. From one point of view it has had a happier ending than any of the nineteenth-century pioneers dreamed of. We now have a compassionate society with far-reaching safeguards and services for almost all the chances of life. From another point of view this same society is like a rather badly-run supermarket, with many goods out of stock or only available in more expensive brands, long delays and too few staff. The Welfare State is both these things — a success and a partial failure at the same time. So much is expected of it that it could always be better but it can never be perfect.

FILM

"CARRY ON NURSE"

Tonight at 7.30pm

East Wing Lounge



Chiropody



Meals on wheels



Old age

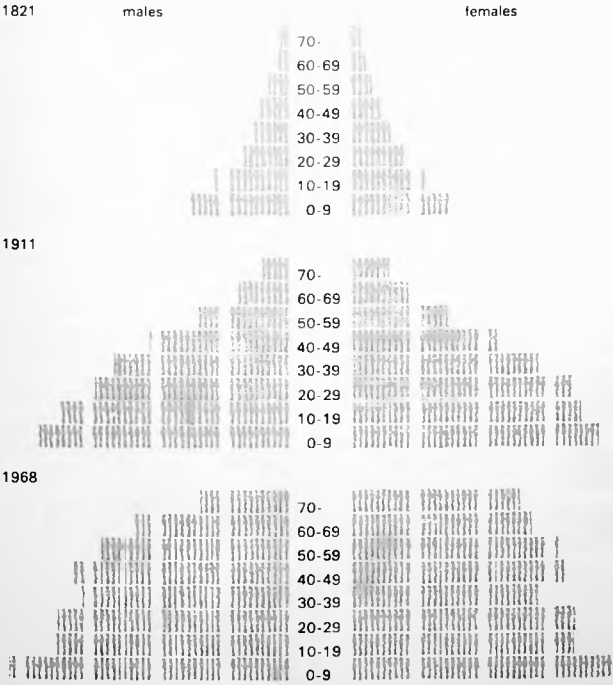
All societies recognize that old age needs special help. In the Welfare State the government provides cash and local authorities provide old people's homes and special services. These include home help and meals on wheels so that people can remain independent in their own homes and special medical care, such as chiropody, which can mean the difference between someone being housebound and able to go out.

The loneliness of many old people is something no government can do enough about. No official action can replace good neighbours and young volunteers.

Advances in medicine mean that more people live longer. More money is needed for pensions. The diagram below shows that in 1911 only a very small fraction of the population was over the retirement age of seventy, supported by those of working age. But by 1968 nearly half the population was either under working age or retired! Increasing numbers of old people can overstrain services. Name any service and you will find old people who need it and don't get it. In some towns the proportion of elderly people is especially high.

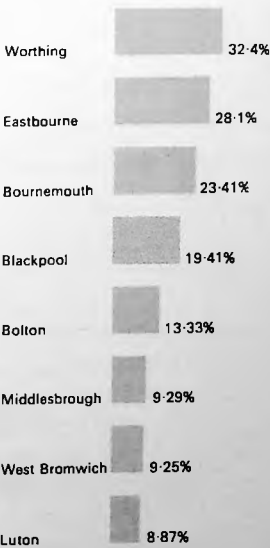


Age groups in England and Wales

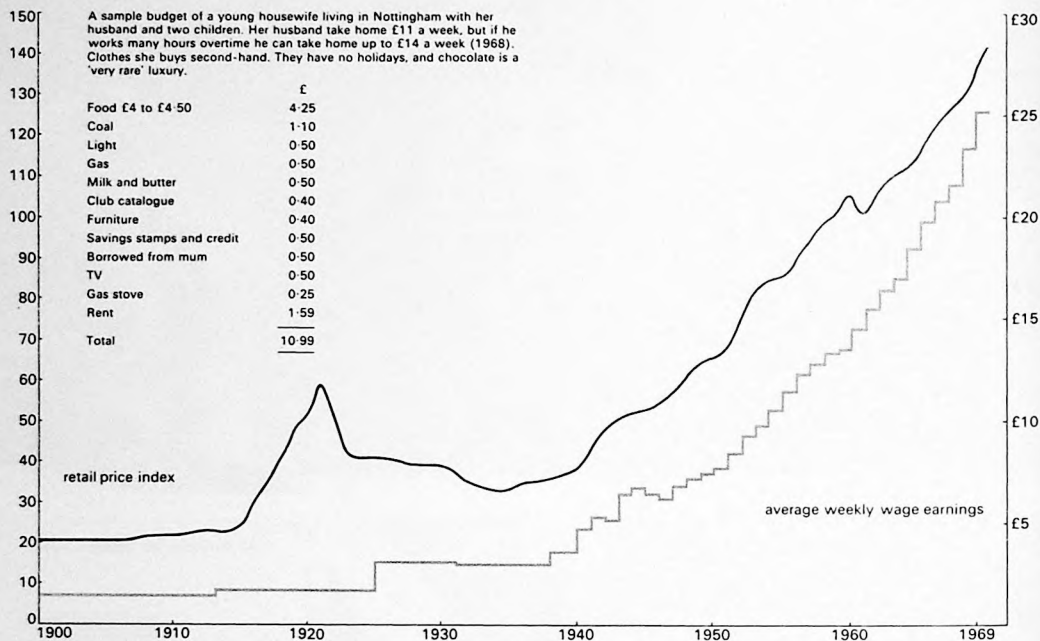


Each figure represents 100,000 people

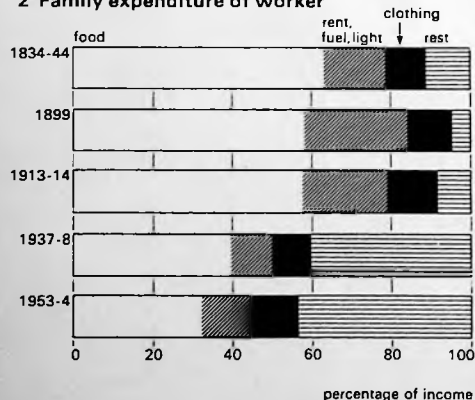
Old people in towns 1966



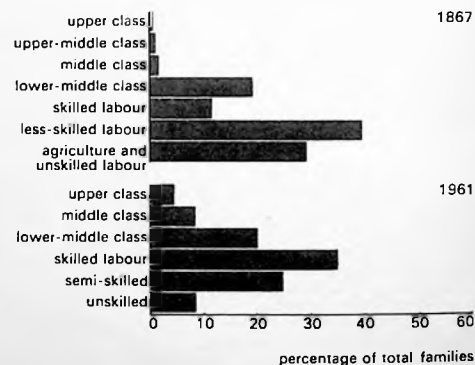
1 Average weekly wage earnings 1900-1969



2 Family expenditure of worker



3 Class structure



Wealth and poverty

Wages have risen steadily most of the century (1) but so have prices. So *real* income has not gone up as much as might appear and at some times has actually gone down. And whatever the average earnings there have always been and still are millions of people earning well below that. The diagrams 2 and 3 show how working-class family budgets have changed over the years and how incomes vary with social class.

There have been striking increases in the money spent on welfare (4). Of course, money spent has to be found from taxation and some have argued that too much is being spent. But we manage to spend quite a lot on other things (5) and compared with other countries our spending on the Welfare State is not as impressive as is often supposed (6).

6 National income spent on social security 1966



4 Social security expenditure 1900-1969

in millions of pounds

		total
1900		
Poor relief	8.4	8.4
1910		
Poor relief	12.4	
Old-age pensions	8.5	
Housing	0.6	21.5
1925		
Poor relief	31.4	
Pensions	94.8	
Housing	18.1	
Unemployment	16.9	
Health insurance, etc.	21.1	182.3
1935		
Poor relief	34.3	
Pensions	98	
Housing	42.3	
Unemployment	73.9	
Health insurance, etc.	25.7	274.2
1955		
National assistance	114.4	
Pensions	94.1	
Housing	83.5	
National insurance	493.2	
National Health Service	445.5	
Family allowances	94.1	1324.8
1969		
Housing	1118	
National Health Service	1813	
Local welfare services	98	
National insurance (inc. pensions)	2442	
Social security benefits	3562	
Family allowances	348	
School meals, milk and welfare foods	161	9542

5 Consumers' expenditure 1969

in millions of pounds

Alcoholic drink	1824
Tobacco	1694
Clothing	2417
Housing	3590
Food	5977
Defence	2307
Education	2328

The Future

The Welfare State is still a subject about which many people disagree. For this book we asked two people who have thought long about the subject to give us their views about the future of the Welfare State.



Timothy Raison

Member of Parliament and formerly editor of the journal, *New Society*

Over the next decade or two I expect there to be a sharper division in the present social services between those which the state must continue to provide and those which will increasingly be borne by the individual or family. Education, health and social work will continue to be fundamentally state financed – education and health because of the high capital investment required, and social work because this is concentrated on those in need. On the other hand, I would see housing and social security as gradually moving back into the private sector, with the state's role being concentrated on the minority cannot provide for themselves. It is only through this sort of approach that we are likely to be able to cope with the ever mounting cost of social provision, and to do what we have to do effectively.



Peter Townsend

Professor of Sociology at the University of Essex and author of *The Family Life of Old People*

Despite the creation of four major systems of social service – education, social security, housing and health – Britain is still struggling, like other industrial nations, to defeat poverty and establish social equality. Since the war of 1939–45 a fifth social service – that of community welfare – has begun to develop. By the end of this century I would expect to see a great expansion of methods of helping people, such as the disabled and aged, in their own homes, improving the quality of community life and involving people in community decisions.

Epilogue: the world about us

The British Welfare State is certainly not perfect. That has already been made clear. But it may be valuable for comparison to know that in the United States an operation in hospital for, say, appendicitis could cost the patient something like £300. And, until the Medicare Bill of 1965, there was no special help available even for elderly people, whose life savings might be swallowed up in a single course of hospital treatment.

If we compare the system of social welfare in Britain with that in other countries in Europe, we will find many differences of emphasis, detail and philosophy. In some countries the state does very little, but makes sure that well-regulated private agencies do a great deal. The government, for instance, may not itself provide a health service or insurance against illness, but it forces everyone to have insurance and it keeps an eye on the firms providing it. In other countries welfare is very much the responsibility of employers, rather than that of the State.

Despite differing methods, many of the results are similar; much the same misfortunes are helped in much the same ways. Over the last fifty years countries in Europe have coped with similar problems and readily borrowed ideas from each other. France, for example, introduced family allowances in 1932; Britain followed in 1945. Some countries are more generous in some respects. At the time of writing, the old-age pension in New Zealand is £6.90 a week from the age of sixty. In Sweden, pensions are not paid until the age of sixty-seven, but the rate is higher (equivalent to about £9 a week), and their reformed scheme will guarantee an income equal to two-thirds of a person's earnings calculated on the fifteen highest-paid years of their work.

Some ideas, of course, are found only in particular countries. What is done in Britain is not necessarily the best or the only sort of welfare. Would some

Swedish ideas be worthwhile here? Newly married couples in Sweden can get a loan of up to 6000 kronor (about £480) to help furnish a home. It is repayable within eight years. Unmarried mothers (or unmarried fathers, for that matter) may also qualify for a loan if they are setting up a home with their children. Housewives particularly in need of a rest can get a grant towards a holiday and the travelling costs involved. Men who move their job may get removal allowances and, in certain parts of Sweden, may get financial help in buying a house there. Widows and unmarried mothers can get help in caring for their children, and grants while they are training for jobs to support themselves.

The real contrast, however, is between the small group of nations who have a welfare system — whether it is actually run by the State, or by private organizations regulated by the State — and the rest. Between the rich countries and the poor, developing countries there is in welfare, as in everything else, a great gulf.

In South America or the Far East or the newly independent countries of Africa, the situation is in many ways like the one described in nineteenth-century England. Each country, of course, has difficulties or advantages peculiar to itself, but the similarities are worth emphasizing. People are flooding from the countryside into new industry in the towns, just as they did into Birmingham, Manchester and Wigan in the nineteenth century. Bad housing, overcrowding and disease often accompany this. Many babies die in the first year or so of life, standards of education are low and there is a constant danger of unemployment and little or no help if it comes. The gulf between the wealthy, educated elite and the mass of people is enormous.

All this has a familiar sound from our own history. It is happening today in many parts of the world. Our



minds are dulled by so many reports of famines and floods, earthquakes and epidemics in distant countries that perhaps we do not always remember that, for many people, daily existence is precarious even without disasters.

Is it any more tolerable to allow gross extremes of misery between people in different countries than it is between individuals in the same country? As reformers and novelists in the nineteenth century

gradually woke people up to poverty and squalor at home, world communications wake us up now to poverty and squalor wherever it is found. Workers in organizations such as Oxfam, Christian Aid and the United Nations are grappling as well as they can with this problem. But it is an immense task. We can no longer think simply of a Welfare State — we have begun to grope towards a Welfare World, but we are nowhere near achieving it.

Further information

This list gives information about some books and other material dealing with the history of the Welfare State in Britain.

Bibliography

Books more suitable for reference purposes because of their length are marked □. Books more suitable for younger readers are marked ■, but most of them are suitable for adults too. Most of the books published since 1955 are still in print. Earlier books should be available in large libraries and some may be reprinted in any case by the time you read this book.

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Lady F. Bell, *At the Works* (Edward Arnold, 1907). Graphic descriptions of poverty in north-eastern England.

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□ Janet Beveridge, *Beveridge and his Plan* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1954). A sympathetic account.

William Beveridge, □ *Social Insurance and Allied Services* (HMSO, 1942), □ *Full Employment in a Free Society* (Allen & Unwin, 1944). Hard reading, by one of the fathers of the modern Welfare State. □ *Power and Influence* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1953) is his autobiography.

□ Charles Booth, *Life and Labour of the People in London* (Macmillan, 1892–1903, 17 vols). Booth's vast survey showed the need for the welfare state by extremely detailed accounts of the poverty, disease, bad housing and defective public-health systems suffered by many thousands in London in late Victorian England. Indigestible whole, but excellent in small pieces.

□ M. Bowley, *Housing and the State* (Allen & Unwin, 1945). A detailed account of the crucial period in the development of housing policy.

Asa Briggs, *Social Thought and Social Action. A Study of the Work of Seebohm Rowntree 1871–1954* (Longman, 1961). A short and well-written study of a leading investigator of poverty.

□ Maurice Bruce, *The Coming of the Welfare State* (Batsford,

new edition, 1968). A detailed account of state social provision since about 1830: much the best account of the subject.

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■ Keith Dawson and Peter Wall, *The Problem of Poverty* (Oxford University Press, 1969), *Factory Reform* (Oxford University Press, 1968). Many well chosen extracts from original sources: valuable books.

□ Cecil Driver, *Tory Radical. The Life of Richard Oastler* (Oxford University Press, 1946). A splendid life of a largely neglected man — active in the 1830s against the New Poor Law and harsh factory conditions.

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□ S. Ferguson and H. Fitzgerald, *Studies in the Social Services* (HMSO, 1954). An exhaustive account of wartime developments, in the official *History of the Second World War*.

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■ Graeme Kent, *Poverty* (Batsford, 1968). A well written study of the problem throughout the ages: a good topic book.

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□ Oscar Lewis, *The Children of Sanchez* (Secker & Warburg, 1962; Penguin, 1964). *La Vida* (Secker & Warburg, 1967, now in Panther paperbacks). Discursive yet telling accounts of poverty in modern Mexico.

□ R. A. Lewis, *Edwin Chadwick and the Public Health Movement, 1832–54* (Longman, 1952). Very detailed.

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Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist* (first published 1838; Penguin, 1965) is largely concerned with the iniquities of the Victorian Poor Law. *Hard Times* (first published 1854; Penguin, 1969) is a brilliant study of the factory life of the 1840s (and of the mechanical education that fitted children for it). Almost all Dickens's novels say much about the condition of England before the Welfare State.

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Visual material

There are Jackdaws (Jonathan Cape) on *Shaftesbury and the Working Children* and *Charles Dickens*. The Manchester branch of the Historical Association has published an excellent envelope of the same type — *Orphan Annie* — containing facsimiles of

twenty-seven documents dealing with children in poverty, and society's treatment of them, between 1715 and 1956. (Haigh & Hockland, Manchester). There are filmstrips on *Shaftesbury* (Common Ground), *Victorian Social Life* (Hulton), *English Social Life, 1902–1918* (Hulton) and *Twentieth-Century Britain* (two parts — with much about social life — Educational Productions). Longman have produced an excellent extended-play record, *The Making of the Welfare State*, to accompany their 'Modern Times' book of that name.

Concord Films Council, Nacton, Ipswich, Essex, hire out 16 mm films on social topics. *St Ann's* shows poverty in Nottingham and *Hard Times* analyses who is poor and why. Shelter, 86 The Strand, London, WC1, and Child Poverty Action Group, 1 Mocklin Street, London, WC2, have up-to-date information on housing and poverty.

Answers to questions on p. 55

- A was refused assistance
- B was sent to the workhouse
- C was given 2s. a week
- D's request was allowed

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